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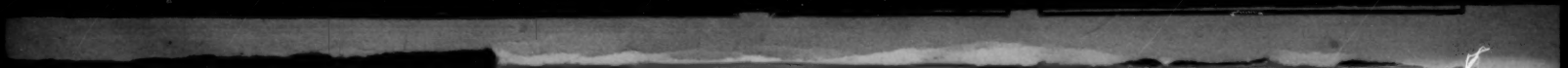

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The Black Cat

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VOL. XXI. No. 1 OCTOBER, 1915 10c. a COPY. $1.00 a YEAR

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When Bink Over-reached

BY WILLIAM H. HAMBY

COLONEL Sylvester Pool sat tipped back on the hind legs of his stool. A broad-brimmed soft old hat that had been yellowed by the fading dye of many new years, was on the back of his head, and a gift cigar in his mouth. The colonel was sixty and seedy.

The office furniture consisted of a stool on which the colonel sat, a screaky swivel chair with a broken bottom patched with a piece of meal sack, an old, battered desk, and a cuspidor that had been badly and enormously hit.

On the wall was a fly-specked railroad map of the United States with a big black ring around San Buano, to indicate that it was the most important spot in the South.

The colonel was listening to the man in the swivel chair talk—a person named Bink Collins from "up North." Bink had aggressive hands, a florid complexion and eyes that always seemed to be licking himself with appreciation. If Bink ever committed murder, he would be sure to brag to the first brakeman he met how cleverly it was done.

"The trouble with you shiftless Southerners," said Bink, "is you are too damn lazy. You ain't got no git-up-and-git."

The colonel did not say anything. He was smoking the person's cigar. Moreover, he had just sold Collins his real estate business, including the furniture, for one hundred and twenty-five dollars cash. It was the best trade the colonel ever made.

"I hope, suh, you'll do well heah," said the colonel.

"Oh, do well," Bink waved his hand, "don't you worry about me. Just watch me. A fellow that can skin a bunch of Swedes out of fifteen thousand will qualify to make a living anywhere, don't you think, eh?" Bink's laugh was a sort of gobble. "That's why I left Minnesota. I used up so much nerve wrenching loose dollars that had growed to Swedes, that I needed a rest. I came down here where there ain't no competition—and where it is as easy to fleece niggers as to pull turnips.

"Tell me about the niggers, Colonel. That's really why I bought your old shack here. I want to work on the niggers, and it struck me this place was just about run down enough to be a good hangout for them."

The colonel's spine stiffened until it ached, and he was conscious of his hip pocket. But he was smoking Bink's cigar—and had sold him the business at a huge price.

"The niggahs," said the colonel rather coldly, "are very shiftless—and pore."

"How many of them are there in San Buano?" asked Collins.

"Oh, quite a considerable sprinklin', suh," answered the colonel.

Bink laughed condescendingly. "That is as near as you fellows ever come to anything—'Quite a considerable sprinklin'.' That's good. No wonder you never succeed.

"Now, I estimate there are about five hundred nigger families in this town, and since the railroad has come, a lot of them have pretty good jobs. There ought to be one in five able to rake up a little dough to help the Collins Realty Company have a profitable rest.

"What I want, Colonel, is this: I ain't never been among the niggers; I don't know much about them, except on general principles. I'm a mighty good judge of human nature, you know. But I want to get the best educated nigger in town to come into my office and sorter give me pointers."

The colonel shook his head leisurely.

"I don't think you'll find any profit in dealing with the niggahs," he said. "They are powerful pore—they don't get no moah than they need to keep a little meal and bacon in their cabins."

"Oh, damn their meal and bacon," Bink laughed. "Who is the nigger I want in here?"

The colonel smoked in deep and mournful contemplation until the fire reached the band of the cigar. It was the only good one Bink had ever bought.

"Well, I reckon Alexander Hamilton Burr McInturff down at Bentley's barber shop is about the sort of cullud pusson you want."

"Thanks." Bink was a man of action. He got up, reaching for his hat as he rose. "I'll go and see him."

Alexander Hamilton Burr McInturff was so shinily black he reflected credit on his mother, who had been a colored school teacher, but later, a washer of purple and fine linen for fastidious railroad officials.

For seventeen years "Ellick," as his young mammy called him, had lived an exuberant and carefree life, even as his daddy had before him. The daddy had long since flitted as irresponsibly and effectively as a migratory blackbird. But young mammy had seen to it that her "Ellick" had all those little personal displays so dear to the colored youth's heart. And he was the best educated young negro in the county. His mother had had a normal school training, and had passed it on to him, diluted very slightly by the weaknesses of the colored mind.

At home Ellick was a scholar, polite and precise in speech and learned in the discussion of sonorous subjects. Out in the settlement he was a young negro with a warm smile, a hearty mellow laugh, a rich voice—easy going, proud and boastful in that harmless play attitude which did not give offense to his own people. He wore gorgeous socks and flowing ties, and was the most admired and best loved young negro in San Buano.

Ellick had never done a day's work until two months before. One evening he had come home in the dusk whistling an "Oh yah whirlee goo" tune, to find the two-room shack dark. He called to his mammy, but got no response. He went through the sitting room to the kitchen and stumbled

over her where she had fallen beside the washtub. After he had run a hundred yards in fright, he turned back and gave the alarm. Friendly negro women crowded in. Young mammy had only fainted—but she would not be able to wash for a long time.

He loved young mammy with all the warmth of his irresponsible, colorful heart. He got a job as porter and shine boy in Bentley's barber shop, where he made four to five dollars a week.

And here the third side of Ellick cropped out. At home, as the scholar, he sat by young mammy's bed and read history and romances and geographies. Along the squalid streets of "Niggertown" he was the light-hearted, laughing dandy—the young beau of the settlement. But uptown in the barber shop he was the nigger who said, "Yes, sah, thank you, sah."

It was as the negro that he shined Bink Collins's big, heavy shoes, and grinned to show his good-will in response to that person's subtle and refined advances in the way of calling him a "damned nigger," and "a black-faced coon," and asking him if he had ever been lynched.

"Say," Collins spoke in an undertone as the porter brushed him, "come up to my office right away, can you?"

"Yes, sah," said Ellick obligingly.

That evening Ellick went home early.

"Young mammy," he said jubilantly, as he sat on the edge of the bed and stroked her hand, "I've got a new job—a job with that white gentleman what bought out Kuhnel Pool, that up North' gent'man."

"What you to get, honey?" For once young mammy failed to correct his lapse into negroism. Provisions had been mighty, mighty scarce ever since her sickness.

"Eight dollahs—and maybe moah."

"What you to do, Ellick?"

"Oh, not so very much of anything," answered the boy, a little puzzled himself. "I's to sweep out—and just stay around."

"I am powerful glad, honey," said young mammy. "You are a mighty fine boy—you is so good to your mammy."

While Bink Collins lacked many chapters of being the climax of cleverness he imagined himself to be, he was not a fool. He studied Ellick as a representative of the negro problem. Bink's negro problem was of course one solely of subtraction. Ellick was still the negro uptown—the porter, the colored man serving the white. And Bink learned a good deal about that side of him. One thing that a negro loves is to be noticed a great deal. He'd rather be abused than ignored. And a ten cent gift counts for more than a dollar in wages. They are hungry for praise. They will bear an hour's abuse if it is tempered with any sort of good-natured appreciation. So Bink simulated friendliness and proprietorship—and for once in his life, gave presents and tips almost recklessly.

"I got him and the whole tribe of Ham, sized up," said Bink at the end of two weeks. "Takes me ten days to learn what these slow-pokes have been trying to learn for a hundred years—how to manage niggers."

A negro is like a child, he thinks a great deal more when he is not thinking than you suspect; and again, when he appears to be pondering a matter deeply he is not thinking at all. Like a child he is subject to the most amazing impulses of loyalty; and again, to the most unexpected quirks of treachery. Generally a negro is very loyal to his own people when there is a clash between them and the whites. He will put his life in imminent peril to protect a crap shooter from the police. But again, when all is serene he will chucklingly help some white scoundrel rob his people of either their money or virtue.

These were not among the observations of Bink Collins. He saw only Ellick's rather subservient willingness—his grinning "thank you, sahs" and concluded he knew all about negroes.

"Ellick," said Collins Saturday night, "I've two or three little deals to pull off, and I've got to have you to help me. We want to make a little money off these damned, shiftless niggers. And when we pull it off—it's good for fifty—maybe a hundred, in your pocket."

"Yes, sah," said Ellick.

Bink Collins had a good idea. Some of the best deeds in the world spring from purely selfish motives.

His plan was to build a new "Niggertown,"—a "plumb, stuck-up Niggertown." That section of town across the track where the colored people all lived, and had to live, was certainly squalid enough.

Bink had bought a plat of ground, high, rolling ground, just east of "Niggertown" and laid it off into a square, and planned to build forty houses, ten on each side of the square, facing outward, with a big common backyard of a couple of acres in the center.

It was a good scheme, only a man like Bink is like a wormy apple tree, which can't bear fruit without getting something rotten in it. It made him positively unhappy to make a profit without cheating somebody.

"Now, Ellick," said Bink, "on this side"—he showed the colored youth a diagram of his plat—"here, facing the railroad, I'll build ten four-room houses for the real big-bug niggers and sell 'em for a thousand dollars. On the north and south ends I'll build ten three-room houses, for the tolerably stuck-up niggers. They will sell for eight hundred. On the east side I'll build ten two-room houses for just common niggers with jobs. They will sell for six hundred.

"Now you know niggers better than I do. I want you to tell me what they like and don't like, then make a list of all the big-bug niggers that get a hundred dollars a month or more, and another of those who get fifty or sixty, and begin to work on them—brag up how fine these houses are going to be.

"If that don't fetch 'em, you scare 'em out of where they live. Go around and pertend with your learnin' that you've discovered typhoid, and consumption, and yellow fever, and bubonic plague, and gangrene, and small pox, and a few other mild diseases, fairly stickin' out of the cracks." Bink laughed and slapped his leg. "By goose, that's a fine idea,

Ellick! You can work that to a frazzle because you can talk like molasses in warm weather. You just go at them one at a time and scare them right out of their old houses, into the new.

"And, you worthless Black Ham, for every house you sell, I'm going to give you five dollars besides your wages. Ain't that some money for a damn coon to make, eh?"

"Yes, sah." Ellick grinned—on his face. But no matter how good-natured a negro is, a constant repetition of "damn coon" does not stir as much mirth inside of him as a bango. Ellick had talked little about his boss at home, which had worried his young mammy much, but that night he told her the full scheme. And they talked it over in all its details. Young mammy had learned a good deal about books at the normal school; she had learned much more about white folks, washing purple and fine linen for particular railroad officials; and she just naturally knew about negroes.

"Now, honey," she said at last, "get your pencil. Now there's Benjamin Butler Hilman, that is cook for the superintendent's private car; and Jerrymander Winninkton, that's head man on the San Antonio dining car." They made out a list of sixty.

The next morning Bink discussed details with "his nigger."

"I've got to get them up cheap, Ellick, but I'll cut your liver out if you tell any of the damn niggers about it. I'm going to drive chunks of wood into the ground for the foundations and cover them up with an outside plank. We'll use two-by-twos instead of two-by-fours for the frame. I'll put in just half as many nails as common, and we'll lay the shingles six inches to weather instead of four."

Ellick rolled his eyes and shook his head solemnly.

"Niggers is awful curious," he remarked. "They's the skeeredest folks in the world. No, sah," he shook his head ominously, "you could nevah sell no house to a cullud pusson that might blow ovah. You can git rock from down by the crick. Then I can go round braggin' how solid they are. Built, I'll say, so no cyclone will shake 'em."

Bink reluctantly and profanely yielded to the superior colored wisdom.

"We'll build the cheap ones first, so the rest will look finer," said Collins.

"No, sah, Mr. Collins—I wouldn't do that. I'd build the fine ones first and sell them; and then when the othah cullud pussons see what high-toned folkses have moved into 'em, they'll all just naturally roll ovah head foremost tryin' to get up beside 'em."

"By goose, you have got some ideas under that wool. Ellick, you are almost half human. That's a good scheme."

Collins began work at once. He bought cheap material and employed cheap labor, but here and there, one thing at a time, Ellick gravely shook his head like a building inspector and declared, "No cullud pusson would buy a house with that and that."

Bink swore that anything was good enough for a damned nigger, and stormed that the cost was going to

be too high, but usually made the changes and in the end, built a pretty fair house, which cost well under the selling price.

"Now," he said to Ellick, "they'll be ready in another week. Begin to sniff around your buyers for them ten deadly diseases."

"All right, sah," grinned Ellick.

The colored settlement had been full of excitement for weeks over the ten new houses going up, and the rumor that thirty more, all for colored people, were to be built.

Ellick had given out no information—at least nothing except what would wet further and greater curiosity. Here and there he dropped vague hints of the grandeur the new houses were to contain, and of the mysteriously easy way they were going to be sold.

"Yes, sah, them houses are plumb fine," Ellick was coaxed into talking. "There'll be electric lights with shades as big as a washpan, like they have on the cars. And there is a special place to set an organ, and they are going to have white walls, smooth, like you can run your hand over 'em and not feel a thing."

"Who-all are to have 'em?" asked Ben Hillman's wife with shining white eyes.

"Oh," answered Ellick, Mr. Collins is goin' to be awful particular. Nobody'll have no chance to get in there, lest they're awful high-toned."

Ellick made several calls. At Belle Herndon's he told about the shining white floors you could scrub with sand until they was as white as cotton. Belle was the best housekeeper in the settlement.

At Jerrymander Wiggington's he told about the marvelous wallpaper that was to be on some of them.

The day the ten houses were finished Ellick took three negroes to Collins's office. They put down two hundred dollars each and signed up to pay eight hundred more in twelve dollar a month installments; the failure of any installment to cause immediate foreclosure.

"Good work, you coon," Bink slammed his fist down between the boy's shoulders, "you got 'em scared to a frazzle."

Ellick only grinned. There had been no word of that. None was needed. They were too keen for the new houses. He brought in two more the next day.

By Friday night the last of the ten were sold. And Bink actually kept his word and gave Ellick fifty dollars. Ellick turned it over to his young mammy.

"I've bought six of 'em, honey," she said with a broad smile. "I got Jerrymander's place for a hundred and twenty dollars, and Hillman's for ninety-five, and the rest for seventy-five. We are to pay ten dollars down on each of them, and the rest five dollars a month. We can rent 'em easy for that much."

In ninety days the other thirty were finished, and sold, every one of them.

Collins had made a big thing of it. He had doubled his money on the negroes, but they really had got something for it. Somehow, that seemed too much like a present—to give people real value for their money. They seemed too happy and contented. Bink liked to have people

he traded with squirm every time they remembered it.

He was sitting at his desk when suddenly he began to laugh. He slapped his leg, and laughed until the railroad map slipped from the wall and came down with a swash.

"Here, you damn coon," he called, "come here. I've got the biggest idea ever hatched."

"Yes, sah," said Ellick, coming respectfully to attention.

"Ellick," said Bink Collins, "I just now begin to appreciate the commercial value of superstition. Why, when you know how, it is as easy to skin a nigger out of his last dollar as it is to steal a cookie from a blind baby. I don't see why in the world I worried along all these years trying to get rich off those cinchy Swedes. Living down here is as easy as shaking a bread fruit tree.

"Now here's the idea, you black son of Ham. You scared those fool niggers out of their old houses into the new without half trying. Why can't you scare them out of the new, and I'll close the mortgages on them and clear two hundred on every house.

"Yes sah," said Ellick grinning broadly. "I reckon I could scare them niggers some way. They is plumb superstitious."

"Good!" exclaimed Bink with an uproar of laughter. That's the stuff. You scared 'em in; you scare 'em out and I'll give you five dollars for every one that gets out."

Ellick's grin broadened. "All right, sah."

That night at midnight, away over north of the new settlement, a bugle rang out faint and mournful, three times in succession. Five minutes, and then again came the sound of the bugle, this time much nearer. The negroes who had awakened shivered and drew the cover a little closer. Five minutes more, and this time it rang out high and clear and mournful right near, swiftly followed by a piercing, blood-curdling scream, like the cry of a surprised traveler in the woods when a panther springs down upon his back. Then groans, deep and terrible. Silence. The negroes shuddered and held tight to the cover and the bed.

The next morning the inhabitants of New Town looked at each other with a wider rim of white around their eyes, but said nothing.

The next night, came the bugle far off to the east. Again it came closer, until it ended in the scream and groans right near the east line of houses.

The next morning the inhabitants talked to each other in awesome undertones.

The third night, just at midnight, the bugle rang out clear, high, and wailing, right in the center of the common back yard, and swiftly followed the scream and groans, then silence.

There was uneasiness all around the square the next day, restless, fearful uneasiness.

"Say, you damned, good-for-nothing coon," said Bink, the next morning, "haven't you scared any of them out yet?"

"No, sah, not yet," answered Ellick solemnly.

"Well, push it along. You ought

to had two or three of them scared out by now. If you onery niggers had any hurry up about you, you might be worth your salt."

"Yes, sah," assented Ellick without a grin.

At nine o'clock that night, Ellick went into the common back lot in the center of the square, and whistled at the back door of Alphasia Jackson's. Alphasia was Ellick's special sweetheart. She was not educated like Ellick, but she had her attractions. Ellick whistled twice. There were uneasy movements inside. A low consultation between Alphasia and her mother, and the door opened the tiniest crack, and the dusky belle's white eyes showed cautiously.

"It's Ellick, honey. Come on out," he said coaxingly.

Reassured, Alphasia came out, closing the door behind her. They sat down side by side on the back steps. In talking with Alphasia or other negroes Ellick unconsciously dropped into their speech.

"You-all's fixed up mighty fine in your new house," observed Ellick.

"Y-a-s," reluctantly assented Alphasia, with a sort of shudder.

Around the square, flickering coal-oil lamps showed in kitchens, but the open spot was shrouded in deep shadows. The wind of the plains whined around the houses.

"I's done by heah about midnight last night," said Ellick awesomely, "and I heerd de awfullest moanin' out dere." He pointed indefinitely at the dark center of the square.

"What you reckon it war?" The dark girl shivered and drew close to the stalwart youth.

"I dunno," said Ellick—less it was one of dem daid priests."

"Daid priests?" It was almost a scream. "What you-all talkin' about?"

"Why, didn't you know?" Ellick was surprised. "This heah was the buryin' ground for them Spaniards long time ago. That's why Mr. Collins got it so cheap. Dem priests dat was up heah and got cotched by the Indians was all buried heah."

"What'd Indians do with em?" asked the negro girl with goose chills creeping over her.

"Um-m—sumpin' horrible! Nothin' ever was so terrible! I don't amaze none that them daid priests moan. When they was all cut and hacked up, they buried 'em in four squares just like these houses—with the big 'un right in the middle.

"I reckon," Ellick got up and glanced around as though getting ready to flee, "I reckon it's the old big priest that's callin' the rest of the speerits up, for dem Spaniards done hate us cullud folks sumpin' scandalous."

Ellick vanished into the darkness.

Uneasiness spread in the colored settlement next day, like restlessness through a herd of cattle ready to stampede.

One moved early in the morning; another two hours later. At noon two more went. Then panic came as though bubonic plague walked the little square. Every darkey there was prepared to get out before dark. There were not drays enough; and some of them carried their household goods back to "niggertown" and slept in the street.

Bink Collins laughed until his ribs were sore and his jaws ached as

though he had been gnawing corn off the cob.

"You black son-of-a-gun, you sure did the job up fine," said Bink when Ellick came to the office for his two hundred dollars. But Bink balked and cut it down to a hundred. Ellick took the bills without making any fuss about it and stuffed them into his vest pocket.

"That's the best show I ever saw." Bink broke into another jaw stretching laugh. "I've got their two hundred and now I get their houses back. Ellick, this is as good as a gold mine. Now I'll turn around and sell them again."

The negro's eyes and mouth opened in surprise. "But—but, boss," he ventured—"white folks won't live where niggers have."

"I'll not sell 'em to white folks," said Bink. "Of course not. As soon as this scare gets over I'll sell 'em back to 'em."

Ellick shook his head positively. "You can't do that, Mr. Collins, 'cause they nearly all have bought their old houses back."

"From whom?" asked Bink.

"From Mrs. McInturff and her son."

"Who are they?" demanded Bink, not recognizing the name.

"Oh, just some cullud folks," Ellick grinned.

"Then I'll sell 'em to a fresh batch of niggers that come in. And we'll tell them about the dead priests."

The negro's eyes walled until they looked like billiard balls. "Good lawd, man! In less'n two weeks every cullud pusson in this United States will heah about dem daid priests. No sah," he shook his head positively, "there won't nevah be no moah cullud pussons live in dem houses."

All the laugh went out of Bink Collins. He began to rub his jaw in perplexity. Why, great guns, he had nearly fifteen thousand dollars in those houses!

"Oh, nonsense, Ellick," he said, reassuring himself, "they'll forget it in a little while.

Still the darky shook his head.

"I tell you," Bink had a sudden idea, "after I've closed out the mortgages, you can pass out the word it was all a mistake. And to convince them you can move into one of the houses."

"Me?" The eyes widened and whitened. The negro backed in terror toward the door. "Me live in one o' dem houses? Good Lawd, man,—not me!"

"Who the dickens will, then?" Bink demanded.

The negro slowly shook his head as he sidled from the door

"Dem daid priests, I guess."

Licking Lickpenny Parkins

BY LELAND S. CHESTER

VERY week-day morning for six years, Elmer Smallwood had turned the key in the front lock of the Parkins Mercantile Company's store promptly at four-thirty o'clock. Although receipts for merchandise sold up to six o'clock scarcely equaled in dollars this number of years, it was old Giles Parkins's inflexible rule that his store be open and ready to serve any chance patron of crepusculous habits that might straggle in. Also, he kept open till ten of evenings to accommodate an occasional nocturnal prowler.

Elmer attended to both the opening and closing functions. During the seventeen and a half hours intervening, he swept floors, opened new goods, prepared window displays, waited on trade, and, when these duties were not too pressing, made out statements and ran errands. And for all this he received the munificent sum of seven dollars a week.

He was a pale, thin-chested young fellow of twenty-two, with dark hair and eyes. His shoulders drooped slightly and his features were worn and tired looking; yet despite this stamp of overwork and insufficient sleep, he was always brisk and courteous. These qualities of forced animation and native comity passed the general riff-raff of the small country town unnoticed, but from strangers they invariably drew favorable attention.

"Why don't you get out of this hole, Smallwood?" Tom Banning, a representative of a large independent provision company, had said to him one day. "You're too good a salesman to waste your time in a dump like this. Why, look at that—" He indicated a skilful arrangement of coal scuttles, oil cans, cooking utensils and other wares, representing a locomotive in the show window. "Now that's what I call genius. I know where you can get eighteen dollars a week and work only ten hours a day. You'll have a chance to get ahead, too. Say the word and I'll get you the job."

But Elmer had shook his head sadly, thanked his would-be-benefactor, and hurried forward to serve an incoming patron.

This, however, does not mean that he was without ambition. He was the only support of a widowed mother and younger sister, who preferred to forego the additional comforts his increased earnings would provide, in order to have him home with them. They had their own cottage, a vegetable garden, some chickens and a cow, and by rigid economy contrived to make the seven dollars suffice.

Therefore Elmer smothered his ambitions and, accepting his uncongenial, unremunerative lot with a sort

of grim tolerance, continued to turn the key in the front lock of the Parkins Mercantile Company's store punctually at four-thirty A.M., and ten P.M. He would have considered it a sacrilege to open five minutes late or close five minutes early.

Sharply at six each morning Giles Parkins would enter the front door, a bundle of mail under his arm, and with a curt "Hustle up now, E'mer, an' get yer breakfas'," proceed to his greasy, old-fashioned walnut desk in the rear. Then Elmer would hasten home, snatch a few bites, gulp down a cup of steaming coffee, and be back at the store in less than half an hour. This proceeding never varied.

The Parkins Mercantile Company still occupied the same building in which it had had its birth—a loose, weather-beaten old structure, situated on the most prominent corner of Neelyville. In appearance, it resembled a faithful old horse that has out-lived its usefulness and yearns for an opportunity to lie down and die.

In this structure, Giles Parkins had begun business twenty years before. At the time, he had less than a hundred dollars, but—so the natives said—by living on stale soda crackers and spoiled bologna and robbing his patrons, he had amassed a fortune. In connection with his retail business, he did a small jobbing trade with several inland stores whose ratings disqualified them with the large wholesalers. With these, he dispensed credit liberally and collected ruthlessly.

Also, he wrote fire insurance, discounted notes and bought live stock. In fact, any transaction that would yield a dollar was not beyond his commercial horizon. And quite aside from any question of gain, he had an innate passion for beating somebody, and, notwithstanding his almost religious worship of money, he seemed to get more genuine satisfaction from the acquisition of one dishonest dollar than from a hundred honest ones.

"Th' man ain't been born yit that kin lick me in a trade," was his favorite boast after one of his tortuous deals. And for days thereafter, as he bent over his greasy ledger, he would smile to the accompaniment of a rasping, sputtering pen.

His miserly habits and tight-fisted methods of dealing had early in his career earned him the sobriquet of "Old Lickpenny Parkins." However, this parsimonious appellation in no way disconcerted him. "They kin call me what they please as long as I hev th' pennies t' lick," was his axiom.

One Saturday evening in late October, when Lickpenny produced his worn, but well-filled wallet, and extracted seven one dollar bills, Elmer broke all precedent and asked for an increase in salary.

"I think I'm worth eight dollars a week," he said, somewhat timorously. "I can get twice that much in the city, but I don't want to leave home. You know I have to support my mother and sister, and seven dollars isn't enough. Make it eight and I'll work even harder than I have before."

The old curmudgeon careened his

neck and shot a surprised look over his iron-rimmed spectacles.

"Eight dollars a week, eh? Well, ye may be wo'th it, E'mer. I won't argy with ye. But if I pay all ye're wo'th, how'm I goin' t' make a profit? It's th' diff'runce between what a man pays fer a thing an what he gets out of it that keeps 'im in business. Besides, E'mer, 'tain't my fault that ye got a mother an' sister t' s'port."

He tested each of the bills carefully between a moist thumb and finger in the hope, perhaps, that one of them might split suddenly and become twins. Then he pushed them across his greasy desk.

"Here's yer money, E'mer." And with his battered derby making his ears stand out like an elephant's, and his right arm pressed hard against his breast pocket, wherein reposed the wallet, he shuffled out.

A few minutes later, when Elmer turned the key in the front lock, he gave it a vicious twist; and when he tried the door to make sure that the bolt had properly shot, the upstairs windows rattled.

"The old skinflint!" he said to himself as he stumbled along the rough board-walk toward home. "The next time any one offers to get me a job I'm going to take it. I've had about enough of old Lickpenny—" Here he broke sharply into his musings and bit his lip. It was the first time he had ever resorted to the nickname and it savored of ingratitude. "Anyhow," he concluded, "I'll get another job."

An opportunity to carry out his threat came sooner than he suspected. The following Monday was Tom Banning's day in Neelyville. When he had finished his business with Lickpenny, he motioned Elmer to the front of the store and said:

"See here, Smallwood, I've got a job for you and you've got to take it. I'm going into business for myself and I've persuaded the boss to give you my territory. It pays eighty a month and expenses to start, and if you work half as hard as you do here, you'll soon get more. You can arrange to be at home three nights a week, too. Meet me at the office next Monday morning."

That night Elmer talked it over with his mother and the next day tendered his resignation.

"All right," agreed Lickpenny surlily, "suit yerself. Ye'll be back here beggin' fer yer job in 'bout a month an' maybe ye won't get it."

Four weeks later, Elmer called on his former employer in the capacity of a travelling salesman. It was old Lickpenny's contention that drummers were a nuisance and should be treated accordingly. He received them coldly and kept them waiting as long as possible.

He acknowledged Elmer's presence with a grunt, never lifting his eyes from the point of his sputtering pen. After much unnecessary shuffling through old letters and invoices, he opened with his customary remark: "Nothin' I want t'day."

"Perhaps my prices will interest you," suggested Elmer. He had heard that brief opener reiterated hundreds of times and knew it was only a feint old Lickpenny employed to induce salesmen to quote an attractive price.

He knew also, that the old churl bought provisions in ton lots to supply the small inland stores, and that nine chances in ten he was then in the market.

Lickpenny squinted out over his glasses.

"Well," he inquired, "what ye got on bacon bellies then—eighteen t' twenty?"

Elmer consulted his list. Fourteen and a quarter boxed; fourteen in burlap."

"Too high. Lard—fifty pound tins?"

"Twelve and a half."

Lickpenny plunged his pen in the ink and turned to his ledger. Then he turned back again.

"I see ye don't know yer business," he said. "I'm entitled to a cent a pound off in ton lots. Make it that an' I'll buy a ton of each."

Elmer considered this. Nothing had been said about selling in ton lots, but such an arrangement seemed plausible. Certainly the man who bought in large quantities was entitled to some consideration. He was anxious to succeed and a two ton order was quite an item.

"Have you been buying on that basis?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Ye better go back an' learn yer business," advised Lickpenny sarcastically. "Ye're s'posed t' know how t' sell yer own goods."

"Well," returned Elmer somewhat indecisively, "if they've been giving you a cent off list, I'll take an order on that basis. I suppose they just forgot to mention it to me."

He filled in an order and was about to tear out a duplicate when old Lickpenny interrupted him.

"We'll jest sign that, E'mer," he almost purred. "If anything turns up it'll protect us both. S'pose now, I'd take a notion to refuse it when it comes in?"

This not being a customary proceeding, there were no specified lines for the signatures of salesman and buyer. So they affixed their signatures to the face of the order, Lickpenny filing away a carbon copy and Elmer retaining the original and tissue.

Elmer left the store with a feeling of exultation which, later in the day, gave way to one of doubt. The next morning, he thoroughly regretted that he had not wired the firm for authority.

Three days later he received a letter from the salesmanager. It was brief and to the point. It read:

Mr. Elmer Smallwood,
Bates Hotel, Cypress, Mo.
Dear Sir:—

We have your order from the Parkins Mercantile Company of Neelyville. Will you kindly advise us who authorized you to quote such prices. See this concern immediately and secure corrected order or turn in your supplies.

By signing the order you have made it imperative that we ship the goods, and any loss occasioned thereby will be charged to your personal account.

Yours very truly,
J. H. Knecht, S. M.

Elmer read the letter through several times, too dazed at first to grasp its true portent. Then it all became clear. He had sold goods at prices he had no authority to quote, and then signed the order. Old Lickpenny had duped him.

He knew in his heart that it was a waste of time to appeal to Giles Parkins; still, it was the only thing to do and he caught the next train

for Neelyville. When he arrived at the store, old Lickpenny was at his desk in the rear, footing up the day's receipts preparatory to closing.

"Mr. Parkins," said Elmer, with an effort to steady his voice, "you must have been mistaken about those prices. Read this letter."

The old man glanced over it carelessly and handed it back.

"Don't seem t' concern me any," he returned dryly.

"But, Mr. Parkins, you told me they always gave you a cent off list in ton lots."

"I didn't," corrected the merchant. "I jest said I was entitled to it."

But you intimated that such was the custom and I took your word for it. And—and it's got me into trouble."

Old Lickpenny twisted his scrawney neck and squinted one eye.

"A trade's a trade," he paraphrased. "An' when I make one I stick to it. If them people want t' send out drummers that don't know their business an' let me make forty dollars off'n 'em, that's their lookout."

"It isn't the company that's losing the money," Elmer elucidated, a quaver in his voice, "it's me—half my month's salary! And I can't afford it. Besides, I'll lose my job. Tear up that order, Mr. Parkins. Forty dollars is nothing to you."

"A trade's a trade," repeated old Lickpenny, transferring the contents of the money drawer to a filthy canvass bag, "an' I ain't responsible fer your'n. If ye make a bad'n ye'll jest hev t' stand it, that's all."

"Then you intend to take my forty dollars and let me lose my job?" Elmer speculated grimly. His voice had lost its tremor. He stood erect; head thrown back and mouth strangely quirked at one corner.

"I ain't a-goin' t' do nothin' but jest make them people live up t' their contract." Lickpenny stuffed the bag of money into his pocket and started for the door, but Elmer blocked his way.

"Let me tell you something, you old skinflint!" His eyes were blazing and his teeth showed. "I'll make every dollar you've stolen from me cost you a hundred. I don't know how yet, but I'll do it. See if I don't." He turned and bolted out the door.

"Th' man ain't born yet that kin lick me in a trade," he heard flung after him.

After this there was nothing for Elmer to do but go to the city and look for employment. First, because he was more familiar with their products, he prepared a list, and began a systematic canvass of the firms that sold goods to the Parkins Mercantile Company. And at last, through the influence of a salesman whom he had known for a number of years, he secured a position in the stock room of a leading stove manufacturer.

Some weeks later, this salesman was passing through the stock room and stopped to talk with Elmer. As the salesman was leaving he said: "I was down to see old Lickpenny last week, and what do you think the old robber wants us to do? Give him a ten per cent trade discount! We've always handled him with kid gloves, but now he's got to come to

us. So don't be surprised if you see him in here soon with his old greasy lid under his arm."

After the salesman had left the room, Elmer's face took on a thoughtful expression. The germ of an idea was beginning to sprout in the back of his brain. Although he could not understand just why, his eyes kept straying to the top of the stock sheet on which he was working. The firm style—"The Mabee Stove Company"—held a peculiar fascination for him.

At last he slapped his thigh and exclaimed: "I believe I've got it!"

That night he wrote eight letters and addressed them to as many country merchants inland from Neelyville. Then he spent several hours filling up sheets of paper which he would read over, knit his brows, and tear up. However, after several attempts, one of them seemed to suit him, for he smiled, stuffed it into his pocket and went to bed.

During his lunch hour, next day, he visited a small printing shop on a side street, and after a conference with the grimy proprietor, left the result of his night's work and departed.

Saturday afternoon, two weeks later, he dropped off the train at Neelyville, spent half an hour with his mother and sister, and hurried to the Parkins Mercantile Company.

"I'm with the Mabee Stove Company," he told Lickpenny, "and I believe you and I can do business on a satisfactory basis."

"Eh," grunted Lickpenny, "come t' time, hev they?"

"You wanted a ten per cent trade discount, I believe, Mr. Parkins. Well, we'll do even better than that. We'll give you the ten per cent and exclusive sale of our stoves in the county."

A broad, oily grin slid over Lickpenny's weazened features and his small rheumy eyes held a twinkle. The old curmudgeon's finer feelings were so calloused from a lifetime of scheming and chicanery that he could look a starveling squarely in the eye while he robbed him of his last crust.

"Say, E'mer," he said with an attempt at jocoseness, "ain't ye afraid t' make another trade with me?"

Elmer met his gaze smilingly. "Oh, I guess not, Mr. Parkins. That little deal in provisions taught me a lesson. I don't believe you will be able to 'put over' anything on me this time."

"All right, E'mer; make that discount fifteen per cent an' ye kin put me down fer a car."

Elmer pretended to study the floor. "I can't do that on a single car," he replied meditatively: "but tell you what I will do: you buy ten cars and I'll make it fifteen."

"Eh—what! Ten cars?"

"Sure. You can handle ten cars very nicely, and make some easy money, too. Listen. I've just thought of a scheme. You can sell two cars yourself and there are eight country stores in this county that can each sell one car. They are all good, too, but they have no rating and can't buy direct from the manufacturers. You go to them and offer to make a contract to deliver to each of them a car of stoves, freight prepaid, not later than the first of October, and they'll jump at it. I'll see that your invoice reads, 'Less two per cent if paid in

thirty days,' and that will give you a chance to collect from them and pay us in time to get the discount. That means seventeen per cent without using one cent of your own money. Sounds pretty good, don't it?"

Lickpenny snatched up a stub of pencil and worked a sum in arithmatic on the back of an invoice."

"You stay here till t'morrow evenin'," he said greedily, "an' I think we kin make a trade."

Although the next day was Sunday, he harnessed his spavined old nag to a rickety buckboard and departed countryward as soon as it grew light enough to follow the roads. Shortly after dark, he and Elmer were again in conference in the rear of the store. Before them, on the greasy walnut desk, were eight sheets of paper, each a contract for a car of stoves, properly made out, signed, witnessed and dated the day before.

"They suttenly grabbed it," Lickpenny grinned exultantly. "I'll give ye credit fer havin' a purty good head E'mer. Might' nigh fifteen hundred dollars right there. E'mer, ye're all right!"

It was now the first of April—five months before the contracts were due. On his way back to the city that night, Elmer Smallwood gazed dreamily through the car window at the flitting darkness and smiled to himself. Severals time during the months that followed, he caught some fellow employe staring at him in a rather amazed fashion, and awoke to the embarrassing knowledge that he was grinning blankly at the wall of the stock room.

Once each month he spent Saturday night and Sunday with his mother and sister in Neelyville, and Saturday, September twenty-ninth, chanced to fall on the day he was due for a visit home. After supper he dropped around to the Parkins Mercantile Company. Old Lickpenny was hunched over his desk, rumpling his grizzled hair. At sight of his former clerk, he grabbed up a sheet of yellow paper and hurried forward. His face was livid and his tightly clenched fists, held rigidly before him, quivered with rage.

"Look at this!" he screamed, thrusting the paper angrily under Elmer's nose. "T'morow's th' first an' them stoves ain't been shipped yit. I sent 'em a message an' this is what I git. Look at it. Come c'lect, too. Says they ain't got no order f'om me. They ain't, eh? Well, I'll show 'em whether they hev or not!"

Elmer took the telegram, glanced over it carelessly and handed it back.

"Oh," he returned lightly, "you wired the wrong concern."

"Hey!" sputtered Lickpenny, tottering about on palsied legs.

"I say," repeated Elmer coolly, "you wired the wrong concern. Fact is, Mr. Parkins, the firm that took your order for those stoves is not in a position to fill it."

The old merchant's features relaxed into an expression that was half grin and half snarl.

"So ye've got yerself int' trouble agin, hev ye? I reckon ye've fergot about that order ye signed, eh?" He shuffled back to his cluttered desk, took down a musty file and extracted the duplicate. He returned, waving it in front of him.

"Fergot this, hev ye?" he sneered.

"I guess you didn't read that order very carefully," speculated his former clerk, "for if you had, I wouldn't have the pleasure of seeing you separated from four thousand dollars."

Lickpenny's face went ashen; then it took on a bewildered expression.

"Four thou—four thou—four thousand dollars!" he stammered. He perused the order feverishly, yet carefully. It looked all right; still, he wasn't sure about it. That cool hint that he was going to be separated from four thousand dollars chilled him with an unanalytical fear.

"Ye can't come nothin' like that on me," he finally declared in defence of his hopes. "I've done business with these people fer twenty years, an' they allus give me an order like this."

Elmer drew the original from his pocket and pointed to the firm name at the top.

"You formerly bought of the M-a-b-e-e Stove Company—" he spelled out the name—"this is another concern altogether: the M-a-y-b-e Stove Company, and, as stated at the bottom of this sheet, your order was taken subject to the terms and conditions on the back."

He reversed the sheet. There were a dozen or so short paragraphs setting forth the usual terms and conditions and near the bottom one which read: "This order is taken with the understanding that at present no such concern exists as is named on the face hereof, and becomes null and void after May 15, 1913, unless Elmer H. Smallwood build and equip a plant to manufacture the products hereon listed; said plant to be operated under the style of the 'Maybe Stove Company.' The style of the proposed concern indicates the very uncertainty of such a proceeding."

"You see," grinned Elmer, "the order automatically cancelled itself three and a half months ago, and wasn't worth the paper it is written on, to begin with. You've always boasted that the man hadn't been born that could lick you in a trade. It was the easiest thing I ever tried to do."

Giles Parkins lifted his iron-rimmed spectacles and wiped the rheum from his eyes. He seemed for the moment dazed. Slowly his greed-cankered old brain sorted out the facts contained in that short paragraph and arranged them in a comprehensible group.

"E'mer," he said at last, "I—I'll send ye t' th' pen'tench'ry fer this." The words were mere gurgles of wrath.

"No, you won't," returned Elmer calmly. "You can't prove that my intentions were not good; besides, there'll be three things to occupy your attention. Unless you deliver eight cars of stoves by Monday night, there are eight country merchants who will present bills for five hundred dollars' damages each. Those are unconditional contracts, and if you fight the claims it will only add court costs and attorney fees. You couldn't find a jury in this end of the state that would give you a favorable verdict."

Old Lickpenny put out his hand and grasped the edge of the counter. He realized only too well, that young

Smallwood spoke the truth. He could not think of a man who, at that very moment, was not simply itching for just such a chance.

"E'mer," he said brokenly, "I didn't think ye would do me this way."

"And I didn't think you would beat me out of forty dollars and my job, either; but you did—and then smirked over it right in my face. You remember I told you then that I would make every dollar you stole from me cost you a hundred? I was a pretty good guesser, wasn't I?"

And as he tramped along over the rough board-walk on his way home, Elmer said to himself: "Four thousand dollars! and all I get out of it is my forty. Oh, well, I'm satisfied."

The Game Called Love

BY MARY ROBERTS

"YOU won't believe this yarn and you'll say I made it up," is the way the captain began the following story, "but I'm not asking you to believe. I saw the thing with my own eyes, yet I don't believe it myself."

The little sponge steamer had lain at anchor for some hours and the members of Professor Rodney's party, after watching diver after diver vanish into the depths and reappear with great gunny-sacks full of living booty, had lapsed into the attitudes—mental and physical—which characterized them on shore.

The professor himself sat listening absently to the captain's drawling indictment of his swart Greeks and Sicilians; John Watts Loring, the professor's young and promising colleague, whose lean scholarly face was tanned to a color almost as dark as that of the divers, was lost in a brown study at the other end of the boat; midway between bow and stern, Doris Rodney maintained a gracefully precarious balance upon the gunwale in the shadow of the bunk-house and gave all her attention, as she had done for some weeks past, to her devoted admirers—"Tub" York, great in name and fame on the gridiron, whose mighty form lay stretched out on the sunny deck, and "Peach" Davis, perched on the corner of the bunk-house roof, where his light figure in immaculate flannels, and his fine profile, of which he was justly proud, showed to much advantage against the dazzling Florida sky.

A group of boatmen, bare-footed and bare-armed, were going aft with a quantity of diving tackle, when a cry from Miss Rodney and a moment's swaying of the girl's form caused them to drop their load and spring to her aid.

"Oh, my ring," she exclaimed piteously, while the others of her party crowded solicitously about her. "It fell into the water! I remembered it was too loose and I took it off to put it on my middle finger and it slipped—oh, papa, what shall I do?"

"I paid a very pretty penny for that diamond," remarked her father, while the other men said things more sympathetic.

"Are you certain it went into the water—not into the boat?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly certain. But I'm sure we can get it if we hurry. Oh, I'm so glad we're on a divers' boat! Please send the divers down right away, Captain Benson. A fish or something might swallow a ring."

"Well, by —— in the name of——" cried Captain Benson, almost choking between amazement and an attempt to find expletives permissible in the feminine presence.

"For mercy sakes, Miss, you don't expect to get that ring back, do you? Why, this here's the Atlantic Ocean

we're on, Miss! When people drops things in the ocean they just says a last 'good-bye' to 'em, that's all. They never sends divers feelin' round on the sea floor after them."

"When they can go down to get sponges I don't see why they can't go down to get my ring. You said yourself, that it was light down there, Captain Benson. And the water is so still my ring must have gone right straight down. A diver couldn't help finding it." She turned to the young men. "Don't you think so?"

York and Davis assented promptly and Professor Loring was regretfully saying something about not courting disappointment, when the young lady's father interrupted conclusively:

"My dear, even if the divers should by a miracle recover the ring, you'd never get it. The captain here has just been telling me how dishonest these men are. They'd 'steal the gold filling from a corpse's teeth, was his graphic expression."

"Oh, dear," exclaimed the girl, her lips beginning to quiver and the tears welling into the brown eyes, when suddenly the golden lights came sparkling through the tears and she cried happily, "Captain Benson, you'll go, won't you?"

"I ain't been down for years, Miss," replied that robust person, "my heart's too weak."

"Papa dearest," despairingly.

"Nonsense, Doris."

The golden lights were rapidly becoming submerged when York saved them by an offer that was not entirely without reference to the discomfiture of the Peach.

"I can't promise to bring back your ring, Miss Doris, but if it would comfort you any, I'm not in the least afraid to go down and look for it."

Davis was not to be outdone by his rival and he spoke up promptly, even while his blood chilled with the vision of the monster-haunted ocean depths.

"Two heads are said to be better than one. I'll go too, Miss Doris. Let us hope the jealous mermaids will have the honesty to—"

Here Mr. Rodney broke in with some impatient remarks about wild goose chases, but Loring did not hear him. Instead, he heard a few words in the half forgotten dialect of those Ionian Isles where he had once spent a summer in research work:

"The ring is in your mouth, Ugo. It fell to the deck and you covered it with your foot. Swear to share with me or I speak."

At this moment the captain gave the speaker some order that sent him below deck and Ugo, a bronzed young Mercury minus wings plus overalls, melted from view behind the bunkhouse. As casually as might be in accordance with extreme haste, Loring turned in the opposite direction and came face to face with the Greek upon the starboard deck. Uttering a few fragmentary sentences in the Ionic dialect, Loring thrust his hand into his pocket for more effective argument, when he saw that the unexpected encounter had had an amazing effect upon the acquisitive Ugo He broke into a strangling cough, his throat twitching convulsively, his eyes protruding and the veins of the forehead swelling to double their size. Without a word, Loring applied the usual remedy, a ringing blow be-

tween the shoulder blades— and Miss Rodney's ring flew sparkling across the deck.

Unhesitatingly the professor, who was said never to part from his sanitary drinking cup and his pocket flask of antiseptic, slipped the jewel into his cheek and returned to his party. He found the captain standing in the bunk-house addressing more or less comforting remarks to the two young men who were within, preparing for their descent to the sea floor.

"No, there ain't any real danger," he was saying. "You'll think red-hot needles are being pushed through your ears into your brains while you're going down, but that'll stop the minute you touch bottom. Look out for your hands, though. There's a kind of little fish only three or four inches long, that lives round amongst the sponges and's got jaws like a steel trap. If you grab him by mistake, he'll have your finger off in a flash and then the blood'll bring sharks about and they'd most likely take both hands."

"That sounds interesting, Captain," remarked Loring, holding fast to his nerve. "If you can accommodate me with a suit I'll join the search party." Inwardly he told himself that to give up the ring at this moment would be but to crown his rivals with a painless heroism and—for who could tell how light a thing might turn the balance of a maiden's favor—it might even end in giving to one of them the victory in this merry game called love. The young professor realized, notwithstanding that the game was new to him, that honor and truth were barred out of it by immemorial usage, but he promised himself that if the time ever came when the other players were eliminated and only he and she were left, he would tell her all that was in his heart and there should be no shadow of falsehood between them.

"Are there man-eating sharks in these waters?" questioned York, as the captain assented to Loring's request.

"Most sharks are too stupid to know there's anything good to eat inside a diving suit unless you give them a sample. If they come nosing around, you just keep your hands out of the way and you're all right."

A little later the three adventurers stood on deck fully accoutred save for the helmets, and were showered with Miss Rodney's premature gratitude, to which York and Davis, the one somewhat glum, the other less peach-like of cheek than usual, responded with a few words as to the extreme pleasure they felt in doing her this trifling service, while Loring contented himself with nonchalantly promising not to return without the lost treasure. The helmets were then screwed on and the three men were lowered into the blue Atlantic.

As Loring watched the light of day grow faintly green about him, his first thought was an incredulous one concerning the "red-hot needles" of the captain's prophecy. A moment later, as he sank steadily and the water pressure increased, the needles pierced his ears with a poignancy which caused him to acquit the captain immediately of the charge of overcoloring his statement. A little lower, and he could only shut hands

and eyes and pray for the bottom.

When finally his feet touched the solid sea floor and the terrible needles were mercifully withdrawn, he opened his eyes upon a world as strange as any which his great laboratory microscope had shown him. A cool green light, that sifted through the interlaced boughs of a great forest, illumined this world in a kind of magic circle around him, beyond which the dense black wall of the great waters baffled the eyes. Beside him, and rising almost to his height, was an enormous sponge-like piece of tremendously magnified honeycomb, through whose gaping pores tiny blue and green fish darted like dragon-flies, while here and there other fish, larger and of a clear canary color spotted with brown, rested in what seemed a state of meditation. At his feet, among the infrequent blades of grass all slanting with the tides, a crab scuttled sidewise and a strangely fashioned little creature propelled itself by means of a small but powerful tail.

He took a few steps in the direction of what seemed a fairy grove of that rose-red coral which bleaches dead white in the upper sunshine, and found that he progressed in a bobbing manner resembling that of a cork upon the surface of the water and without effort on his part. A spirit disembodied might feel thus light and free he thought, and fancied that his present awe and wonder were not unlike those of a spirit newly born into one of God's unimagined worlds.

As he moved among the silent splendors, whose high noon was but a shadowless gloaming, he forgot the sunlit upper world, forgot even the pretty maiden who had sent him on this wild-goose chase, forgot even his own assured triumph. Memories of age-old myths came to him, of Aphrodite, sea-born mother of life; of buried Atlantis with her quenched lights and her forgotten gods; of mermaids whose lure no flesh could withstand; and of that old persistent tale of a mortal youth who weds the sea king's daughter and dwells with her in her watery palace until by disobedience to some mystic command, he is banished to the upper world, there to live in exile forever, longing after his lost paradise.

"Always wonder, beauty and horror," mused Loring, considering the myths from a point of view impossible to their makers. "But what a lot of anthropomorphism our racial egotism has mixed up with it. It's only of late that we have learned to believe in worlds which have no relation to us, no use for us save as possible nutrition."

Loring had been standing still for some time over a bed of striped sea flowers, when a big dark object came swiftly from the blackness toward him. Before he could stir the object came to a standstill and proved to be a big fish with enormous protruding eyes, and fins that vibrated slowly as it hung before Loring's face. Recollecting the captain's words as to "nosing sharks," Loring hastily slid both hands to his back; then turning his head to look through the side and back window of his helmet, he withdrew them quickly, for he saw that he was surrounded by a circle of great gazing fish. Many-formed and vari-

colored they were, but all alike, motionless, save for the slow fanning fins that held them in the yielding element, and all with their big glassy eyes fixed unwinkingly on Loring.

Stepping cautiously forward Loring found that the circle moved with him as so many shadows. Obeying a boyish impulse he made rapid darts in all directions and the fish scattered promptly, but only to reappear soon. Walking on with the pleasing sense of man's mastery even in an alien element, he came suddenly upon an object stranger than anything he had yet seen—a monster of clumsy shape, many-eyed, with several short, thick tentacles. A momentary devil-fish illusion gave way before the fact that two of the tentacles ended in hands which groped above its head for another tentacle which appeared to grow from the back of its neck, and rose straight and slender toward the upper waters.

The professor was somewhat chagrinned to find that his brother adventurer—York by the size—had stayed under water so long, but his chagrin passed as he perceived that the groping hands had caught the life line and were jerking it with a vigor eloquent of the gentleman's desire to be hauled up immediately. Himself unseen, Loring watched the ascent, checking an impulse to clutch the other's feet as they rose through the clear green water above him.

"An appreciable interval must elapse before my appearance," thought Loring, slipping his hand to the place where his vest pocket usually was and finding no watch there. "I am certainly living up to the penny paper version of the absent-minded college professor. I'll count a thousand, then give the signal."

With one hand on the life line, he went from hundred to hundred, his speed increasing as approaching triumph brightened before his mind's eye. Somewhere about the sixth cycle he lost count and went part way back, then decided that by the time he reached the surface a sufficient interval would have elapsed, pulled the rope and raised his hand to take the ring from his mouth.

Not until his fingers touched the hard rubber of his mask did he know that it would be as impossible for him to break the surface with Doris Rodney's diamond sparkling in his hand, as it had been impossible for York and Davis.

"Bet he didn't see anything prettier than himself down there," remarked the captain, as Peach Davis, after the briefest of immersions, was drawn aboard. He added, affecting extreme amazement, "And if I can believe my eyes, Miss, he ain't got that ring!"

"He wasn't down long enough to make a thorough search," retorted the young lady warmly. "I am sure one of the others will find it."

This speech—prompted not by callousness, but by a fervent desire to protest her waning hopes—was the first to strike Mr. Davis's ear as the helmet came off and his heart, previously disaffected by the unreasoning demands of the reigning goddess, cast her out and installed in her place a certain dark-eyed Glee Club girl who had long shown her appreciation of the position.

There followed a blank interval in which the shadow of the bunk-house moved slowly eastward. The foreigners gathered about the hoisting gear, conversing in their native tongue as to the extreme folly of the Americans in dealing with their women folk. One swart elder went so far as to say that had wife of his—they regarded Miss Doris as Professor Rodney's wife and were scandalized by the open adulation of the younger men—been so careless as to lose a jewel of price he would give her a beating of the utmost severity. Ugo, to whom—doubtless by favor of the saints—had fallen the duty of tending the life lines, kept his peace with a countenance that bespoke sweet and satisfying thought. He was telling himself that he must make no mistake as to which of the lines belonged to Loring, and he also wondered how one got a ring out of a dead man's mouth. Should one break the jaw?

The blank was at length broken by the reappearance of Davis from the cabin, again charmingly attired in white flannels, his hair and tie as gracefully arranged as ever. He leaned upon the rail smoking a cigarette—this accomplishment, in deference to Miss Rodney's prejudice, he had hitherto concealed under a bushel—and ably parried the captain's pleasantries. To the deposed goddess he appeared deaf, dumb and blind.

Several cigarette stubs had been tossed overboard when Ugo transmitted York's signal to the captain and the hoisting began. It was a tense moment when the big man broke the surface and every eye save those of the tranquil Ugo and his no less tranquil friend, sought the empty hands.

Mr. York came out of the diving suit in the sullen and reproachful mood that characterized him when his football team had lost a game. Doris Rodney cared more for a useless bauble than for a man's life, he told himself. Down there in the depths he had been scared and now he was made to feel like a fool all on her account. A full apology might win his forgiveness, he decided magnanimously, but it must be very full. A vision of a little country cousin who once wept over his dislocated thumb contrasted unfavorably with Miss Rodney and hardened his decision as to the fullness of the apology.

"There was a slew of sharks around me all the time," he remarked glumly, giving his experiences. "Regular man-eaters—'tigers of the deep'—you know."

"Big fellers, kind o' round headed and dark on top?" inquired the captain. "Them ain't sharks, son. They're sea pigs—'porkers of the deep' you might say. Real good eating they are, too, and—"

"And any minute I might have stepped onto one of those big shell fish that shut down on a man's foot and hold on like the jaws of death—"

"Them kind don't inhabit these waters, young man. You'd have to go clear to the Indian ocean to find them," declared the captain, to the relief of Miss Rodney, who looked troubled.

When the captain left the group Davis joined it. "All that water pressure's bad," he remarked. "Might kill a man with any heart trouble."

He was about to add significantly that his own heart was perfectly sound, but Mr. York interrupted with a harrowing recital of certain swoons which he had almost suffered. "Only my strength of will kept me pulling at that rope even when I was half unconscious," he declared, watching for signs of apology. "With less determination I might be as dead as a doornail by now."

All this had its effect on Miss Rodney, but not the effect intended by either one of the young men. Leaving them without a word of explanation, she sought the master of the boat.

"Captain Benson," she said earnestly, "please have Mr. Loring pulled up immediately."

"Why, Miss, he ain't give the signal yet. This one's taking time to make a real thorough search for that ring."

"Something tells me that he has swooned and cannot give the signal!" she said, turning wide eyes of fear upon the dazzling blue of sky and sea suddenly grown ominous to her.

"Nonsense, Dolly," exclaimed her father. "He's enjoying an opportunity which may never come—"

"He may die while we stand here doing nothing," she cried, twisting her hands as if to break the delicate bones and looking helplessly from the jocular captain to her annoyed father.

Then a change, subtle but complete, came over her. The quivering lips grew steady, the brown eyes hardened, her drooping figure straightened and seemed to take on new strength. In that difficult moment, the pretty child, who had hitherto known only the ways of pleading and cajolery, found herself a woman with all a woman's right to demand the safety of her own.

Swiftly crossing the deck to the group at the hoisting tackle, she gave the order brief and imperious—"Haul up!" laying an eager hand upon the rope as she spoke.

"He ain't make-a signal—no jerk-a," declared the discomfited Ugo.

But she repeated her order with so much of menace and mastery in her look, that the swarthy group was unwillingly impressed. They saw that in this topsy-turvy America, masculine authority, even that of the captain on board his vessel, was gone when one of the ruling sex appeared, and they fell to with sullen alacrity. Ugo worked with the rest, but his help amounted to little for he was absorbed in promising candles to all the powers in his pantheon if they would but see to it that the man at the other end of the rope be securely dead.

When, after the longest minute Doris Rodney had ever lived through, the uncouth bulk of the diver broke the blue ripples, it seemed that the saints had indeed been tempted by Ugo's lure. The grotesque, drooping figure was swung aboard, and being released from the tackle, dropped prone and lay motionless.

Captain Benson and Ugo had the helmet off in an instant, the latter being immediately put aside by Miss Rodney, who knelt and put her soft arm between Loring's head and the hard boards of the deck. His face was so deathlike that she held her breath lest some one speak aloud the fear that was at her heart, but after

a moment Loring's eyelids parted slowly over motionless eyeballs. That fixed stare reflected in miniature the blue sky, the slender towering spars of the boat criscrossed with rigging—but reflected without comment or comprehension. His last thought before losing consciousness had been that he was about to enter a new world and on suddenly regaining this he could not at once recognize the light and color that hung above him like a vast picture.

Then a voice, faint yet piercing like a ringing in one's ears, reached him as from afar, and he remembered life and youth and love and the pursuit of the perfect joy. His wide remote gaze narrowed and shortened to meet Doris Rodney's as she bent and spoke his name, and in her illumined eyes he saw that for him the pursuit was ended—that love was his as certainly as life itself.

"I knew everything was all right," declared the captain. "Sorry to pull you up so unceremonious, but the little Miss insisted." He added satirically, "Do you want to go back?"

"No!" said Loring. "No!" With the recollection that the radiant world held others than himself and Doris Rodney, came the recollection of the merry little game which he had played with York and Davis. Raising both hands, he pressed them to his face, and thought. To one whose feet were already upon the threshold of a holy place, the little game appeared a piece of crude, irreverent folly. Yet when he took his hands from his face, one was closed upon a small hard object and he held out the other for help in rising.

"We set him on his feet and he stands there wobbly but dignified," is the captain's version of this part of the story. "The man ain't born who can bow very graceful in a diving suit, but he bows the gracefulest possible, and holds out his hand to the little Miss.

"'Here's your ring at last, Miss Rodney,' says he, easy and casual, as if it was a postage stamp. 'I hope you will pardon my delay in bringing it to the surface.' And there in the palm of his hand, all wet and sparkling from the sea, was that identical ring. She takes it as something expected and natural, never having lost anything in the Atlantic before mebbe, or mebbe practicin' for them two other rings I hear he's give her since. But we sensible men folk was all struck in a heap and I ain't ever got over it."

Amor Omnipotus

BY ALICE D. BAUKHAGE

THEY had talked of it steadily from the moment that they left the luncheon table for the cozy corner by the drawing room fire until late in the afternoon. They had laughed over it and waxed serious about it, grown vexed over it, finally ceased to argue it. But the faces of both Miss Stanhope and her guest still wore the stamp of unmoved devotion to their original opinions. Only, in the finely cut features of the former, conviction assumed the form of a slightly disdainful smile, an expression becoming the easy victor; while in the case of the guest it spoke in the dark eyes sparkling with excitement, and in the pouting underlip of a somewhat childish mouth.

By this pair, as they sat watching the roofs and spires beyond the Charles River fade into the November twilight, the entrance of Mr. Lansing was welcomed as promising fresh fuel for the fire of argument. Indeed, this privileged familiar had hardly adjusted himself in his favorite corner when Miss Trevor, smiling across at her hostess, remarked: "Perhaps Mr. Lansing could help us to decide our argument, Mora. Men are credited with being broader in their views, less influenced by prejudice or sentiment. Shall we submit the question?"

"Certainly," responded Miss Stanhope. "We shall be so glad of an unbiased arbitrator, Mr. Lansing, that we will spare you the weighty arguments pro and con, and simply state the question of our debate: Whether the deepest feeling is not experienced by the cultivated mind as opposed to the untutored savage, or rather, to put it more correctly, whether the trained or the untrained mind feels deepest. Miss Trevor holds that the human is capable of the deepest sentiment when unspoiled by art, while I protest that the greatest cultivation presupposes the great capacity to feel. Now you have traveled far and wide and are equally at home here in the 'Hub,' and in the waste places of the earth. Tell us whether it is the Bostonian or the Hottentot who is superlatively sad and glad."

Richard Lansing glanced from the beautiful face of his hostess to the merely pretty one of her guest. Both met the smile with an answering one. Miss Stanhope, leaning against the high back of her chair, held a feathered screen between her face and the fire. Miss Trevor, on the low seat of the chimney corner, sank back among the silken cushions. For a moment there was silence in the room while Lansing, who had acquired a reputation among the feminine folk for doing and saying the fitting thing at the fitting time, seemed pondering how in this case he might maintain that reputation.

Presently, however, the lines of his well disciplined face relaxed, the pleas-

ing conversational smile vanished and a retrospective look darkened his eyes, as though he had from out of the fire's depths conjured up a long forgotten scene.

"Your question calls up an incident that I have not thought of for years," he said, "and yet it so impressed me then that for months afterward it haunted me, and just now in that moment's silence I saw distinctly, not this firelit interior, but instead, a stretch of sodden sand to north and south, a tall gray rock behind, and before me the immeasurable vast gray sea; a slow rain falling from out a sky so dense and leaden that it seemed another sea, and on the sand against the rock's base—but," smiling apologetically, "you will not understand without the explanation, the inevitable explanation that one always skips as much of as possible when the story teller is not at hand in person to be offended—forgive me if I tell too much.

"To begin with, eight years ago, when I was so young that life seemed very stale, flat and unprofitable in this fair town, I went West in search of a sensation. Not West in the beaten track of tourists, but the far Northwest, even to the distant Olympic Peninsular. Here on the Pacific Coast was carried on a sport at that time new to me, that of otter hunting.

"I have tried my hand at many kinds of hunting, but never found anything so dangerous, so barren of results to the amateur, and so fascinating. As you doubtless know, the hunters of the sea otter are, or were then, chiefly Indians, for no mere white man possesses the skill or patience necessary to success. The hunters live during the season in wooden towers built as far out into the sea as possible, and from these solitary and dangerous perches watch for hours for the animals to appear on the distant half-submerged rocks. Then, with rifles of great carrying capacity, they shoot them and when the tide comes in patrol the beach for their booty.

"I will not bore you with an account of my attempts, though they were interesting enough to me at the time, but it's with the chief of otter hunters that my story has to do.

"I had met him several times, and by the liberal bestowal of *chic-a-min* which, done into English from the native Chinook, signifies money, had gained the gruff permission to shoot from his watch tower, which was indeed a veritable one—a tiny hut lashed by strong cables to the summit of an isolated rock that rose a sheer fifty feet from the sea which, except at low tide, dashed against its base. On the land side a narrow zigzag path led down to the strip of beach between the rock's base and the shore.

"Sitting idle at the store one afternoon in February, I heard the factotum of the place remark that a storm was coming and, although I donned my mackintosh and set out immediately, the rain was already falling in solid sheets as, with head bent to meet the blast, I plodded northward. The idea had suddenly come to me that no better point of observation could be found than Copalis Rock, and I tramped cheerfully onward for three miles with that end in view. I arrived opposite the rock just in time

to wade across the deepening channel, scrambled up the tortuous path and stood panting at the threshold. Opposite the door was a low, wide window, sheltered somewhat from the driving rain by the projecting eaves, and at this window stood Jim, rifle in hand. He turned quickly at the sound of my voice and to my voluble greeting responded with as much cordiality as one ever expects from a Siwash; handed me a rifle and pointed to a rock upon whose slippery surface small black objects were just visible. So much done, he gave me no further attention for the next half hour.

"From time to time our rifles cracked and our bullets sped seaward, either to carry death to the unsuspecting little animal or to bury themselves in the waves. The gloom was so thick that we often could not see the result of our efforts, though in a momentary lift of the fog the rocks showed bare; and we were about to desist when, with an inarticulate sound, Jim caught up his gun again. It was evident that his practiced eye detected something to me invisible, for his face was lighted up, illumined I might say, by a sudden fierce expression I had never seen there, though I had often watched him at this sport and wondered at his calmness in moments when I trembled with exitement. Today his hand trembled as he pulled the trigger and almost simultaneously with the report, the gun fell to the floor with a clatter. 'A big fellow this time, Jim?' I inquired, as he stooped to pick up his rifle.

"He looked at me a moment and then answered absently, 'Yes, yes, big fellow—one ver' big fellow."

"As the night fell, the storm increased, and the most exacting person in search of a new sensation could have found no fault with the novelty of the one I experienced during the long hours of pitchy darkness.

"In my rational moments I knew that I was in no great danger, for the hut, lashed by great cables to the rock, had probably withstood many such a tempest. To do myself justice, I do not think I feared any bodily harm, but it was as though the forces of nature were overcome by the intangible powers of the air. Up, down, on either hand, was utter darkness. The rock itself, our only point of contact with the earth, seemed to have slipped from beneath us, so apparently without foundation was our little dwelling.

"And then the noise! The weird, uncanny voices of the sea! Low, loud, impetuous and insistent, as though its victims, the souls of dead men below, were uniting in a chorus of wailing, prayer and execration.

"I could not sleep, and from dark until dawn, wandered about the room. Jim did not lie down either, but sat by the fire throughout the night in absolute silence, unmindful alike of the raging storm without or his raging guest within.

"The night seemed interminable and I suppose I consulted my watch at least once in ten minutes throughout its duration. Jim consulted nothing, and yet at six o'clock, although there was no sign of day visible, he arose and began to prepare himself for going out. I, too, donned my mackintosh and when at half past six, the

prevailing blackness had given place to gray, we left the cabin and picked our way down the slippery path.

"As he left the house, the Indian's manner altered and in place of the characteristic immobility he had shown all night, I noticed again the fierce excitement I had seen in his face the day before. Regardless of the danger that threatened, he clambered swiftly down the crag, dislodging in his haste great pieces of rock and clay, thus rendering my path just so much more difficult. We reached the base safely and looked up and down the beach for any animals that might have come ashore with the tide. Presently Jim uttered one of his characteristic grunts and started forward up the beach. I kept pace with him as best I could until he broke into a run. I had never before seen him display such eagerness and was at a loss to account for his unusual behavior. Still, my inferior vision descried at this moment two black objects on the sand, a sight which impelled me to follow my host's example. He of course, reached the goal first and I saw him pass the first object, a large otter, and rush on. Then, as he reached the second one, I was amazed to see him drop on the sand beside a figure which I now saw to be that of a woman.

"Even this revelation, however, ghastly as it was, hardly accounted for Jim's action, for I knew that he had no relatives among the Washington Siwashes, having come down from British Columbia some three years before. Further, he had always maintained a sort of feud with the lazy creatures who much preferred appropriating the spoils to engaging in the dangers of otter hunting. One vagabond in particular, known as Tony Queets, he had suspected of stealing the results of his labor, and had threatened him with dire punishment if he should so much as promenade on Copalis Beach.

"This much the stage driver had told me on my way up from the harbor and had added, 'But yonder comes the Siwash that ketches 'em all, Jim as bad as the rest. He's dead gone on her; he gave her a black velvet dress last summer. She's got it on now.'

"The object of Jim's generosity had passed us just then, a rather good looking Indian girl in a somewhat passé velveteen dress, on the bosom of which was the ubiquitous purple ribbon and silver cross of the Order of King's daughters. She's been to the Reservation school and got converted,' my informer went on. 'She's going to marry Jim, she says, but Tony Queets, he says she's going to marry him—said so last week down to the store. Jim was just tying up his pack and he turned round quick as lightning and mumbled some Chinook jargon that shut Tony up mighty sudden.'

"The remembrance of this gossip came back to me now as I approached the prostrate figure. Jim lay prone beside the poor drowned creature, his brawny hand clasped over the limp brown fingers. His face was buried in the sand, hers was turned skyward, and to my horror I saw plainly in the left temple, a small dark hole — the unmistakable sign of a long range rifle ball. Her wide-open eyes had

not lost the expression of terror that death had surprised there, and on the bosom of her sodden velvet waist shone the silver cross of her order.

"In a moment I saw the meaning of it all—Jim's last shot and his strange excitement. He had seen the boat and thought to kill his thieving rival; had fired with his unfaltering deadly aim, and killed the girl he loved, loved in his own fierce, savage fashion, but surely loved, else why this terrible abandon. After a time I spoke to him, again and again, but he did not heed me or give one sign of hearing, so at last I went away, expecting to see him again in a few hours' time.

"As it happened, however, only the next morning the chance for a new sensation lured me to the Canadian Northwest for a supposed few days' trip, which so lengthened that it was three months before I returned to the Olympic peninsular, on my way to the East.

"Arrived at the settlement, my first quest, naturally, was for news of my old friend and fellow sportsman.

"From a hurried word or two with the store keeper, I learned that the otter hunter still kept at his post, but that since the accidental shooting of his girl, he was seldom seen in the village. Even when he did come, my informant said, he always appeared from the direction of unbroken wilderness and not from his island tower, and often, when hunting was the best, visitors to his hut would find the place deserted and Jim unaccountably vanished.

"All of which narrative so wrought upon me that, when an hour later I, too, found Jim's retreat untenanted, I would not be satisfied to go away without some effort to account for the mystery of my strange friend's whereabouts.

"As I crossed the beach, returning to the mainland, and stood looking to right and left, above, below, in the hope of discovering some sign of him, I suddenly descried, branching off to the left of the road that lead to the settlement, what seemed a narrow but deeply worn pathway, which I knew had not existed three months ago.

"The next moment I was striding swiftly over this little trail, convinced that it lead to Jim or news of Jim.

"And so it proved. At the end of a three mile tramp over desolate wastes of country, halfway up a rugged hillside, on the edge of the unbroken wilderness, I found him. He lay prone on the ground, face down, silent, motionless, except for his deep breathing, his hands outstretched and clasped as in supplication.

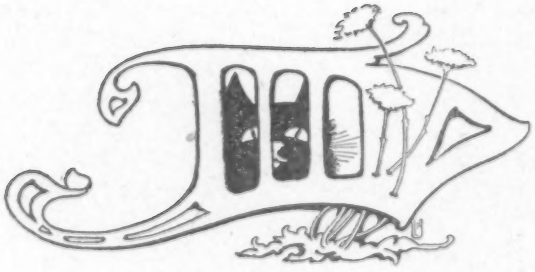
"Before him there rose a rude structure of roughly piled stones, from which gleamed a small metal object; it was the little silver cross that I had last seen on the breast of his Indian sweetheart!

"In a moment everything was plain to me—the new pathway, Jim's strange disappearances, the pile of stones, the prostrate figure. And as I stole softly away I felt that unwittingly I had intruded upon a sanctuary; that out there in the wilderness Jim had erected an altar to his dead love, an altar before which he worshipped her memory, and would continue to worship, every day of his life."

Lansing paused, and his eyes, which had been fixed upon the dying fire, met the tear-bright eyes of Linda Trevor. And from behind her dainty hand-screen, Mora Stanhope caught the look and her woman's heart knew what it portended. But what would have availed the long line of cultured ancestors, if her voice had faltered when she broke the silence to say calmly:

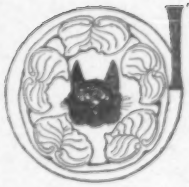
"You have proved a valiant ally, Mr. Lansing. Miss Trevor has won and I accept defeat with what grace I may."

And she rang for tea.



The House on the Hill

BY JULIE CLOSSON KENLY



IT was at the House on the Hill that it happened—the real fairy story of my childhood. For that matter, the great gray stone mansion looming up, silent and isolated, on the terraced slopes at the foot of which stood our own ugly white cottage, had always been fairy haunted for me. Existing as I did, alone for most of the day, the motherless only son of an overworked country doctor, it was no wonder that at nine I was living a double life in a world of double meanings.

Why be a pale freckled little boy in shabby clothes when one could as well be a velvet clad fairy prince with eyes like sapphires and cheeks like roses? Why study tiresome sums in the cheerless library or ride a broomstick around the neglected garden when in fancy one could spur a magic horse to the rescue of the imprisoned and enchanted? In fact, why take any notice of the world as it was when the beautiful world of make-believe was always to be had for the choosing? That, had it been reduced to words, would have been the sum of my infantile philosophy—but words can never bring back the light of that dream world, the charm of my dream companions, least of all can it reproduce the atmosphere of mystery and romance lent by my fancy to the House on the Hill.

For what reason was it always kept shuttered and barred, when the smoke from the chimney betrayed the presence of some inhabitant? Who was the occupant that wandered through the great mansion, strolled in its old-fashioned garden on moonless evenings, yet never showed himself to passer-by? If my father knew he never told me and I would as soon have thought of offering my body as a subject for one of his experiments as I would have laid bare my gauzy fancies for his rough handling. Indeed, I think that his instruments could have hurt my flesh no more than his keen eyes hurt my spirit on the rare occasions when I had dared to speak to him of needs beyond food and clothes. On the whole, they were unspeakably wretched moments for me, those interviews with my father, moments when the need of a real home and parents and playmates would possess me to the point of unmanly tears, and in the end, as is the case with many a boy of older years, would set me to making believe all the harder and to summoning up the more determinedly my fairy friends, especially the unseen denizen of the House on the Hill.

It was late one summer evening, in that gray, sweet, melancholy hour of the country twilight, that I clambered up the path through the terraced grounds of my fairy castle, my mind still sore after one of these dreaded interviews. As I made my way

through the tall, tangled grass and seated myself in the vine-covered porch that was my favorite nook, my heart went out with a great wave of pity to the silent occupant of this strange mansion. Perhaps he, too, at times, was lonely and unhappy; perhaps he wanted a companion. Why not—the idea dazzled me with its possibilities—why not write to him and find out?

To this day I cannot be sure how much of make-believe and how much of sober expectation went to the composition of the letter that I hurriedly indited, on a piece of brown wrapping paper, to the unknown being within the old mansion. What I said I cannot now remember except that one waited without who pitied him and would fain help him to achieve freedom. But I can recollect more distinctly than the events of yesterday, my futile search for any crack or crevice through which I might thrust the daring epistle, my rejection of the commonplace device of ringing the bell, leaving the letter like a valentine on the crumbling door-step, and running to the cover of a friendly bush to await results. I can even recall the delicious thrill with which occurred to me the daring expedient, whose audacity fairly took my breath away. Far up in the square tower chamber a latticed window swung open in the evening sunlight. Lying in the vine-covered porch was my latest treasure —a home-made bow and arrow. What could be more fitting than that I should attach my note to the arrow, aim it at the window, and—twang—my letter would be delivered in true fairy prince style? And so indeed it was, leaving me, bow in hand, gazing exultantly into that tower window, waiting with childish exultation for what should happen next.

For a time it seemed that nothing would happen. Ten minutes—twenty —half an hour passed, and then—but even to this day I cannot write it without excitement—then the wished and hoped for, but hardly to be expected, came to pass. Flashing out from the upper window, tossed by an unseen hand, there fell, straight at my feet, something white tied with silken cords. Could it be? Yes, there was no mistaking it—the unknown had spoken! He had declared himself to me in a letter—and such a letter! Even in my dear fairy books I had never read of an epistle like this, written in a crabbed hand on a curious, crackly, parchment, redolent with an Arabian-Nights-like perfume; while its story—but the letter I have still and can quote to-day those strange words that as a boy of nine I read with amazed, delighted eyes:

"During twenty years I have lived in this lonely house, the home of my ancestors, and for twenty years I have lived apart from the world. Except when I glance from my study windows and see the frozen sparrows I do not know that it is winter; nor should I know of spring or autumn but for a woof of pink blossoms tangled in my old trees or a glimpse of branches dripping with the dead gold of tarnished leaves. From the outside world I have only two visitors, Doctor Jeffries—"My father," I thought with a gasp of astonishment—"a decided, ordinary person, and his man, who

brings my food. With these I have little in common, but the doctor is the only person who can relieve the terrible headaches from which I have suffered for years. Except for these I have no acquaintance, as I have explained, with a world which I had thought to renounce forever in spite of my youth. Yes, youth, for you must know that I am a discoverer; yes, I have at last distilled life. In my study stands a great urn where the precious fluid brews, drop by drop; while I have watched age creeping on my two companions, hair by hair,, wrinkle by wrinkle, I have rejoiced, in spite of my seventy years, in my still youthful bearing, my undimmed eyes, and my steady hand. Yet, in spite of everything, I thought that I had renounced the world, that all my life was shut between the pages of my mystic books until last night, when a strange thing happened to me. It was evening, and I had been sitting moodily before the fire watching the coals crimson in the waning daylight. Having nothing else to do, it occurred to me to open the old mummy case which I had got years ago at a tomb near Cairo, and in the excavation of which I received the blow on my head, which has been the cause of all my subsequent trouble. The reason why I have never opened the case was that I had only recently finished my study of the hieroglyphics with which its entire surface was covered. From them I gathered much of interest of Egyptian history, but of all this you shall read some day in my book on Eastern Archæology, now almost completed. I dragged the case into the firelight. It resembled all others I have opened, smelling strongly of death and Egypt. I was half an hour unrolling the mummy's swathing bands of mouldy linen. The form seemed very perfect and I dreaded its sudden disintegration on exposure to the air. At last I drew away the broad bandage about the throat, and —how shall I tell it? There lay beneath the crumbling linen a strip of living flesh! I hardly dared breath, but knelt rigidly, while band by band, my trembling fingers tore away its wrapping until before me was revealed the body of a live woman. Her hair was dull red and plaited in innumerable braids after the fashion of old Egypt, while her lashes rested on her cheeks in sleep. She was covered with gold rings, bracelets, and chains. A breath from the open window fluttered among the linen rags on the floor, shaking their mouldering fragrance into the room. She sighed and tried to move. I raised her gently. At the noise of her jangling ornaments she opened her eyes and looked at me!"

At this point the writer breaks into a series of ejaculations descriptive of the beauty of the "tropical moth that had burst the cocoon of her grave clothes to come to him," interspersed with learned remarks concerning her relationship with the royal house of ancient Egypt—either equally unintelligible to the youthful reader. But this much at least was clear, that in my House on the Hill lived a traveler, a scholar, a discoverer of the elixir of life, who had awakened from a thousand-year-long sleep a princess of ancient Egypt; and that he had chosen me—an insignificant nine-year-old—

for his dear friend and helper.

What form that help was to take the writer did not say. He hinted, however, at jealousy on the part of Doctor Jeffries, jealousy of his fame, his discoveries, his final miracle of resurrection. He hinted even more vaguely at some power that the doctor possessed over his actions, and by which he could for the present prevent the writer from leaving this gloomy mansion and finding a fitting home for his beautiful princess. Further details he would not give in this letter—only asked me if I would be under the latticed window every evening ready for any call he might make on me.

Would I be ready? Would Aladdin be ready to rub the magic lamp? And to me my adventure at the House on the Hill was more than jars of gold or palaces of jewels; for now I was no longer alone. I belonged to someone; I shared his secrets. Day by day he confided to me by way of these Eastern scented parchment missives tales of his beautiful princes whose nautch dances, extinct with the Egyptian Pharaohs, and fiery songs of the desert, raised her in my estimation far above the milk-and-water princesses of my former acquaintance. In those letters, too, groped for oftentimes in the damp grass and read by the lamp of a dozen fireflies imprisoned in one of my father's glass medicine vials, was I not told presently of plots and machinations, of stealthy steps heard in the hallway and schemes on foot to separate him and his beautiful Egyptian? And did I not recognize all these statements as true to the course of events in my beloved land of make-believe? Even that finally he pointed out my father, Doctor Jeffries, as the object of his suspicions, and the instigator of these plots, was not this quite in keeping with my knowledge of my father's character? Unnatural thoughts, perhaps these last, but no more unnatural than the life that made them possible.

And so the days passed—feverishly active days, in which I secreted unlimited clothesline for possible rope ladders and slept on the floor or out of doors on the ground to increase my hardihood for a probable long journey. Anxious days, given to examining a wardrobe, alas, by no means suitable for the rescuer of an Egyptian princess. Gloomy days, presently, when the communications from the latticed window suddenly ceased altogether and neither letters nor flowers nor even a wonderful rolled gold pin, bought with my entire capital for the beautiful Egyptian and delivered by the faithful arrow, won any response from the occupant of the House on the Hill. Finally, that never-to-be-forgotten day when, groping one evening in the dew-damp grass, I found the long expected summons. Yes, it was the summons, but, alas, how different from that which I had expected! Written in a trembling hand, on a common unperfumed bit of paper, it said nothing of flight to far-away lands, of life in some over-the-sea castle, with him and the beautiful princess; it spoke only of a week's terrible illness—the old head trouble; of an operation to be undertaken against his own will by Doctor Jeffries; of his belief that

the whole affair was a scheme to separate him from his beautiful princess whom, however, he had chained to his wrist that she might be with him even while he was under the surgeon's hands. But here the letter broke off, unfinished, leaving me to confront a problem outside all the resources of my juvenile philosophy. Of the motives that inspired my next movement, no grown up, not even I, can judge. But the act itself, my first onset upon first one and then another of the house entrances, my plunge into the darkness, following upon the sudden yielding of the porch door, the audacity with which I followed a single ray of light to the half-open door from which it proceeded, and then the sudden petrification of my body upon that threshold—all that is only less vivid than the picture revealed to my staring, incredulous eyes. For there, in that dimly lighted old drawing room, seated in a huge arm chair, his head swathed in bloody bandages, I beheld the figure of a man, aged, shrunken, bent, with one clawlike hand clutching the hand of my father in an agony of despair, while, chained to the wrist of the other hung what? What was that hideous object whose parchment yellow skin hardly covered its protruding bones, whose eyeless sockets looked straight into the horror-stricken eyes of the old man in the arm chair, whose fleshless arms were decked with rusty bracelets? But here unconsciousness fell upon me.

Weeks after, when I was strong enough, I heard the whole story and knew that the hero of my wonderful romance was only a poor scholar who had lost his mind through an injury received during an Egyptian expedition. He had lived for twenty years in the House on the Hill, waited on by his old friend, my father, possessed by a delusion that he was still in the glory of his young manhood and cherishing of late, as his beloved companion, the mummy that I had seen on the night of my visit to the House on the Hill. I was even allowed to visit the pathetic figure restored for the few remaining months of his life, to a mind called right by an operation named successful. Perhaps in so doing my father thought to chasten my imagination, to show me what it meant to live always in a world created by fancy; certainly, through the story told in my delirium he was roused at last to the need of providing me a more normal life with companions of my own age. But whatever his motive, the object lesson was not needed. From the moment when I saw those two hideous shapes in the drawing room of the House on the Hill, the world of make-believe was blotted out of my life forever.

Very likely it is better so. And yet to this day I wonder whether the operation that opened my hero's eyes and mine to the world as it is, was altogether a success.

The Coffin

BY DAVID S. LEVY

IT had been a villainous day. The snowstorm of the last week had finally culminated in a real Siberian blizzard. From the first rising of the sun, the storm had gradually strengthened in fury, until at midday, the air had been one mass of flurrying white. Throughout the greater part of the afternoon this had continued. Now as the sun was setting, the fall of snow had subsided sufficiently to allow it to redden momentarily the whiteness of the world.

Ivan Petroff came to the entrance of his lonely office and shading his eyes against the brilliance of the snow, looked down the little valley spread before his door. A railroad track stretched from one end of the vale to the other. Petroff directed his gaze along it. As he stood motionless in the doorway, the sun slanted down from behind one of the snowy hills that hemmed in the end of the valley, and for a moment remained suspended directly above the track. A smile lit up Petroff's rugged face as he saw outlined for a few seconds the fast receding shape of a hand-car.

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and waved it vigorously in answer to the fluttering kerchief of the man he had just relieved. The next instant both the indistinct figure of his comrade and the blurred shape of the hand-car sailed into the bowels of the sun and disappeared from sight.

Ivan Petroff lowered his hand from his eyes and turned to close behind him, the iron door which guarded the entrance to the government railroad office, opening only twice in every twenty-four hours for the sole purpose of admitting the clerks. As he did so he paused to glance at his immediate surroundings.

The scene about him was desolate. On all sides lay piled up in ghostly shapes the wild works of the frost and wind. Not a house, not a living creature, not a single mark of civilization, or of human habitation, or of human visitation, save the small one-storied railroad office, the short vista of steel rails, and on both sides of it, the two lines of telegraph poles and their wires, heavily freighted with snow, relieved the utter dreariness of this remote corner of the northern world.

Now from the horizon the sun disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared a moment ago. It left everything a vague blank—the towering white hills, the narrow white levels, the darkling mass of trees, the tracks, the poles and their snow-fattened electric wires, were in an instant enveloped in the resulting gloom. Petroff gazed about and shrugged his shoulders at the hopelessness of the prospect. He was on the point of turning to barricade himself in for his night's work in the office, when

suddenly he stopped short and stared in astonishment.

Out of the darkness advanced a gruesome procession. It consisted of two rows, three men to the file. They were carrying a long coffin. Up to the door they came, staggering under the heavy mass. Not a moment did they hesitate, but marching up to Ivan Petroff, they deposited it at his feet.

The peasants straightened up. Each man removed his cap and stood with bowed head over the rough deal box. Then from the rear of the group advanced the spokesman and addressed himself to the bewildered clerk.

As the man advanced, Petroff started violently from his daze and snatched from his pocket a long revolver.

"Stop!" he shouted. "One more step and I shoot you dead. Don't you know you're trespassing on government property? No one is allowed to loaf around this office."

The peasant stopped in his tracks.

"Master," he whined, "do you not know me? It is I, Michael. Michael, the grave-digger of Kiel."

A smile of recognition and of returned confidence spread over the bold features of the night clerk. He stepped partly, but warily, out from the defensive position he had assumed behind the half-closed door.

"Ah, Michael! It is you then! Who would have known it? It is so damnably dark. The gloom and the air are so ungodly that I could have sworn to the Devil that you were all ghosts issuing from the ground. But what brings you all the way from Kiel? And what thing is this to be carrying around at this time of day?"

Petroff pointed to the long coffin with a grimace of aversion. The five tall peasants were staring at it moodily with downcast eyes.

The grave-digger crossed himself.

"Master," he said, "it is Nicholas; he who formerly kept the tavern at Alkitch. A fever seized him five days since, and here he is. These," he said, pointing to the five motionless peasants, "are his relatives and pall-bearers. You know how it is. 'Twas a most fearful day. We set out in early morning before the storm had broke. Half-way out on the road, we were caught in the white of the blizzard. Since mid-day we have made only three miles. The graveyard is yet two miles farther on, and it is now too late to think of burying him. Besides, it will be impossible to get the priest at this hour, and the grave will have to be cleared of the snow."

The grave-digger paused to recover his wheezy breath.

The funeral cortege remained quite still and impassible. Petroff looked with uneasiness, first at the coffin, then at the peasants, and finally at Michael.

"Well," he said, shifting nervously, "what now?"

"Master," said the grave-digger bluntly, "there is no place for miles around where we can leave poor Nicholas. Will you be so gracious as to take him in? The Holy Mother will reward you. The people of the village will praise you!"

The peasants raised their heads and gazed at Petroff with anticipatory gratefulness. He shrank back.

"Oh, Master," exclaimed the grave-digger, stepping forward, "if you are afraid, I shall watch the corpse in the office over night. You are not to blame, for you are unused to such things. But yet, the people in your village have said that you are not afraid of the Devil himself, and that is why I thought that with you would poor Nicholas find a resting-place over night."

Ivan Petroff winced slightly. He had for a long time borne in the peasant community a reputation for atheism that was the scandal of the countryside. Having had some education, he laughed to scorn the current superstitions with which the ignorant peasants around him were saturated. The grave-digger had hit a vulnerable spot. Could he refuse to take in the dead out of sheer fright of the cadaver, and afterward be looked up to in the village as a man not above the ordinary? He hesitated for a few moments.

"Michael," he said slowly, "it will be quite impossible to do what you say."

The peasant drew back with a gesture of disappointment and despair. The five grenadier-like peasants remained coldly impassive.

"I mean," continued Petroff hastily, "it is unthinkable that you, an ordinary civilian, should remain in the office over night. You know what it would mean for both of us? Six years in the government mines of Sebeer!"

"True!" exclaimed the grave-digger. "I had not thought of the district rules against strangers."

"But," resumed the clerk, "it is unthinkable that Ivan Petroff shall refuse an old friend so small a favor as this. Afraid of a dead man? Michael, tell your friends to bring old Nicholas in. Many a night have I had his hospitality in Alkitch. Aye, and nights as cold as this, too. For this, the last night of his stay on earth, shall he have the hospitality of Ivan Petroff."

The six peasants were moved as one man with a motion of solemn joy.

"A thousand thanks, most gracious Master," cried Michael. "The Holy Spirit is in you; the Holy Mother shall reward you."

"Tut, tut!" the clerk said testily, paling perceptibly as the six peasants moved with the long coffin toward the little doorway.

"There!" he cried. "Stop now, right there. I can't let any one put his foot even on the threshold. You will have to push it through the door from the other end. Ah, now! That is right."

As the six men pushed the coffin from the outside, it slid quickly past Petroff, who superintended the operation with his long revolver from his post behind the door.

"That will do now," said he, "the door will close very easily that way. Now remember, Michael, you must come for our friend at six sharp in the morning. I leave at six-thirty, and I don't want Boris to be scared out of his wits when he comes to relieve me. I won't be able to coax him into the place for a year if he should learn that it has held a dead man for so much as a single instant."

"Master," cried the grave-digger

with emotion, "be at rest. We shall come long before six. May a thousand blessings rest upon your head. What say ye, brethren?" he asked, turning to his comrades.

The five peasants spoke simultaneously.

"Amen!" came the deep bass chorus.

"A holy night to you, gracious Master," said Michael, moving off with his companions.

"Good-night," said Petroff sulkily. He stood for a moment on the threshold, and watched the peasants till they became indistinguishable in the heavy gloom.

"A plague take these thick peasants," he muttered, as he turned his back upon them. "Here is a deuce of a fix."

He cast a fearful glance into the dark interior of the office, and shuddered as he discerned the darker bulk of the coffin outlined in front of him. The darkness made him uncomfortable, and he sprang over to the wall and snapped on the light.

For a moment he stood undecided. Then he strode resolutely over to the door which he had closed behind him and let down its great bars. Bending down toward the coffin, he placed his huge hands against the end, and throwing all of the tremendous strength of his body against it, he pushed the ponderous box slowly but steadily into the dark corner to the left of the door.

Ivan stood erect, his breath laboring from his efforts. Then he bolted and locked and barred the iron shutters, and after looking into the great massive safe to make sure of the government money, he placed his revolver in the cash drawer and slammed the heavy door.

At this moment he heard the distant shriek of a locomotive. "St Nicholas!" muttered the startled Petroff. "I had almost forgotten that inspection car fooling with this box."

In a few minutes the fast-puffing locomotive and the inspection car rumbled by. Petroff pressed the button for the white light to show that all was safe and well. The engineer replied with a triple whistle. For a moment Petroff hesitated about his reply, but then recollecting that the new weekly code began on that night, he answered with the proper signals. The engineer rejoined with a single toot, and within sixty seconds the noise of this last vestige of railroad traffic for the night had lost itself among the hills.

All then relapsed into heavy silence. Petroff turned off the light in the corner of the room, leaving only the one swinging immediately over his desk. In this manner, the coffin was shrouded in total darkness, while the narrow circle around the clerk was flooded with light.

Petroff then set himself resolutely to his tasks, resolved to drive from his mind all thoughts of the coffin and its contents. But try as he might, he could not compose himself to his routine. Try as he might to prevent them, the imaginary terrors, the hidden secrets, all the mystic fearsomeness which human beings associate with the dead, fled, now in confusion, now with startling vividness, through his brain. The slightest irregularity in the monotonous tick-tack-tick-tack

of the ancient office clock sent the blood in wild rushes to the back of his head, and made him look violently and suspiciously into the inscrutable darkness of the coffin-corner. The most imperceptible catch in the scratching of his pen, the unusual sounds of his quickened breathing, the nervous movements of his fingers or of his limbs, kept his head continually bobbing up from his writing, and his eyes glaring at the dark corner of the room.

For a time he regretted that he had snapped off the other light. But the idea of having in such a case to view the ugly coffin all through the night, caused him to banish that thought. Undeniable it was, certainly, that the long box in the corner now weighed oppressively upon his imagination and upon his reasoning faculties. His superficial show of semi-atheistic bravado before the ignorant peasants had passed away the moment he was alone and confronted with the grimness of the incubus his cherished reputation had brought down upon him.

By ten o'clock, Petroff, from the sheer weariness induced by the physical strain of rising his head up and down to gaze in the direction of the coffin, and from the nervous tax which thoughts of the coffin had imposed upon his brain, began to drowse in his chair.

Three-quarters of an hour later, he awoke with a frightful start. A sharp wind, which had lain dormant since sunset, had again risen and was whining down the valley. The clerk shuddered at the sound of it. In a kind of semi-conscious frenzy, he shot a fierce glance in the direction of the coffin. Nothing but the same heavy gloom hung there. Petroff sat bolt upright in his chair, absolutely quivering with the tremendous volume of suppressed excitement. His dream had been troubled. Apprehensions of terrible danger still lingered in his sub-consciousness. He would have cried out, or he would have sung, or he would have whispered, had he dared. But the fiendish low whine of the wind overpowered in him any impulse of interpolating his own voice in the tensity of the room's atmosphere.

He was at this moment a completely changed being. His short troubled doze had left him deprived of the attributes and the qualities which at other times were his. Now, he was a creature—a creature suddenly awakened from sleep—a creature divorced of the dominance and the intimacy of the Ego; shorn of all moral power of resisting external encroachments, whether physical or mental or spiritual, upon his own mentality—a creature devoid for the moment of all distinct memory; conscious only of the huge, horribly disproportioned images of physical things, palpable or impalpable, which hurled themselves into his receptive brain.

The howling wind, the shrieking wind, the lonesomeness of his forlorn situation, the bare gloomy office; and, towering above all, and interweaving itself with all, a coffin,—the long, horrible black coffin which lay there in the blackness of the room,—these were the only things which flitted through the darkened chambers of his mind; which pulsed through all

his nerves; which usurped the place of sanity and reason; which excluded from his consciousness anything and everything that did not contribute to and converge upon, the one imminent idea which now had complete possession of him—the idea of the coffin and its corpse!

This morbidity, this fear of impending catastrophe and its consequent reaction upon the will to live, upon the primary instinct of self-preservation, had produced in Petroff, in the one brief moment since his awakening, all that fearful hypersensitiveness of the nerves and of the emotions which manifests itself ordinarily in the incipient contortions of the epileptic alone.

The wind shrieked louder and louder and whistled intermittently. It was not so much the insistent howling of it that transfixed Petroff in his chair. It was the whistling! This was alarming in the extreme. The shrieking of the wind seemed to bellow in his ears, "This is not the wind. This is no natural cry. No wind ever whistled like this."

Thus, all the living energy within Petroff was called up and concentrated upon two senses alone—his hearing and his sight. His ears and eyes were strained intensely. His eyeballs stood stood out perfectly still, glaring feverishly at the corner where lay the coffin. His ears sought to catch a sound which he thought he had heard coming from that darkness.

For a few fleeting seconds he remained in this suspended state. Then he heard distinctly—rubbing, rubbing, gently rubbing—a slight grating sound in the corner of the room.

This was the signal for the bursting of his emotions. He leaped from his chair with a low tremulous cry. With lightning motion he seized the swinging electric light above his desk, and turned its beams full upon the coffin.

What he saw paralyzed him! The lid of the coffin was suspended fully half an inch above the rest of the box. As Petroff glared wildly at it, the lid, now in full illumination of the electric light, slowly and gradually descended until it rested perfectly upon the sides.

Petroff's eyes burned. Even as he stood, bereft of all reason, the coffin lid began to rise very slowly; and at a height of a half-inch it remained in absolute suspension.

With a piercing shriek, the maddened clerk hurled the light from his grasp and sprang across the room. The swinging, oscillating rays shone for one instant upon the coffin as the clerk reached its side. In the same flash of the second, the lid fell heavily in its place.

But nothing had escaped the clerk's distorted vision. He had caught one lightning glimpse of the coffin's interior.

Inside it lay a gigantic body. The face was terrible to look upon. The eyes had evidently not been closed in death; for they glared into vacancy. The chin and jaws were heavily bearded. The lips were parted, and between them there was the gleam of teeth. The rest of the body was indistinguishable, though it bore a resemblance to the common ferocious "moujik's." Only immediately upon the center of the body, and

extending from the stomach to the neck, lay a glittering blade. One hand rested upon this prodigious knife The other hand was indistinct in the gloom.

"Oh, God, Christ, Jesus!" shrieked the frenzied Petroff. "My God! Help, help, oh, help!"

Hardly had he uttered these screams, when the coffin lid shot up, exposing its horrible contents in convulsive animation. Petroff caught one glimpse of the blade moving off the breast, and the next instant he hurled himself upon the lid, crashing it down upon the figure.

The quondam atheist was now shaking violently with terror. He was no longer a reasoning being, unless the blind spontaneous working of the instinct of self-preservation may come under the definition of the rational.

At this moment a sudden noise arose above the dismal howling of the wind in the valley. It was the sound of three shrill whistles. After a minute these were repeated. And after another minute they sounded once more. Then the wind howled deafeningly in a sudden burst of fury.

As if in answer to these three whistles, the coffin-lid began to move violently beneath him. Muffled sounds as of demoniacal cursing and groaning issued from the box. The agonized Petroff almost swooned from sheer horror. Only the straining of every muscle in his Herculean body as he strove to keep the lid down, prevented him from losing his senses.

The struggles beneath him in the coffin continued for some time with spasmodic outbreaks. Then they grew weaker gradually until they subsided altogether.

For a few moments, the clerk was unconscious of this cessation. All he thought of was the kinetoscopic series of events which had preceeded it. He had seen the coffin lid move. He had seen the body inside the coffin. He had seen the awful face. He had seen the murderous knife. He had seen the coffin lid shoot upward before he had instinctively thrown himself upon it. He had seen the huge body moving within the coffin. And he had heard at the same instant a gasping sound.

But his mind did neither summarize nor co-relate these extraordinary phenomena. All that was branded upon his memory were the vivid separate images of the things he had seen. There was no reasoning power to link them up and form a connected deduction. All that surged up to the surface were the superstitions which he had heard, and which he had secretly harbored at the very bottom of his outwardly free-thinking and atheistic mind.

Then, he suddenly realized that the struggles beneath him had ceased. At the same instant his wild eyes became aware, for the first time, of the bright circle of light around his desk. The telegraph instrument and the telephone loomed up mountain-high befor him.

An impulse seized upon his feverish brain. He would communicate with the barracks beyond the valley. But how to reach the instruments? He dared not leave his present position on the coffin, for fear of the terrible thing within it. There was only

one thing to do. Oppressed with fear, and driven by fear, rather than by any reasoning of his own, the witless clerk began to act automatically.

With his eyes riveted upon the far circle of light, with his ears pricked up for further sounds, he began digging his heavy heels against the floor as though he meant to drive them through it. The floor was of smoothly-polished stone, and the cracks between the flags were wide. Friction was thus slight, and his heels found numerous foot-holds.

Slowly but surely, the coffin began to move toward the narrow circle of light. The huge box was propelled forward now to this side, now to that, with each movement of the clerk's piston-like legs. In this way, the mean course of the coffin was kept in a fairly straight line. Gradually it began to emerge from the gloom.

In twenty minutes, the clerk was sitting astride the coffin within reaching distance of the telegraph instrument. With a dozen convulsive digs he brought his grotesque vehicle close to the desk.

He seized the sounder and bent over the machine. He touched the transmitter and moved it up and down. But he did not notice that his attempts at constructing a message were futile. He had lost all power to use the code. All of his co-ordinating faculties had deserted him. All he was conscious of was that the parts of the instrument failed to reciprocate. There was neither spark nor rattle. There was no current! The means of communication were gone! He had heard of wire-cutting, and this was the first thing to flash in a vague way across his brain.

But the telephone! That was now the thing! It communicated with the military barracks by a secret underground wire. Intuitively he turned to it. Propelling the coffin another foot forward, he came within reaching distance of the instrument.

He snatched the receiver from the hook.

Ah! There was the welcome buzz which told of life in the outside world, of swift communication with external help which might rescue him from this chamber of horrors.

He did not signal at all, but listened intently for a sound from the other end of the wire. The bells were so arranged at each end that they sounded the moment the receiver was taken from either hook. Presently there was a sharp click and an intenser buzz rushed into Petroff's straining ears.

"Great God!" shouted Petroff. "Posloff, is it you? Ho! Captain! Posloff, tell me, is it you?"

"Yes, this is Posloff, you crazy fool. What the devil do you mean by disturbing me at this hour of the night? What's the trouble? What the devil do you shout that way for? Have you gone mad?"

"Captain," cried the hysterical Petroff, "quick! Take a company of your men. Fly! Come with all speed. I am beset by demons. I am sitting on one now. Oh, God! There he moves again! Oh, for the love of Christ Jesus, rescue me! Posloff, rescue me! Help, or I am a dead man! Oh, good God!"

"Petroff," shouted the captain, "I believe you are crazy. Are you afraid

of the dark—"

Petroff felt a fearful struggle in the coffin beneath him.

"Posloff," he screamed, "quick! The Cossacks, bring them or I am a dead man! Believe me! Do not joke!"

The Captain was evidently alarmed by the earnestness and the mad tone of the clerk.

"Oh, all right then, Petroff. I shall come with my men inside of twenty minutes. Don't die in the meantime. I shall bring a bottle of vodka. Good-bye."

The clerk felt a sharp click in his ear, and automatically he hung up the receiver.

Scarcely had he done so, when a horrible yell, rendered ten times more horrible by its being muffled, emanated from the coffin. Almost at the same time the lid began to swell beneath Petroff from end to end. He screamed with fear and terror. For a moment he was almost lifted bodily from the coffin by the titanic convulsions of the struggling being beneath him. With an effort superhuman, the frenzied clerk ground himself down upon the lid with agonized fury. For five seconds the lid remained in a state of equilibrium, balanced by the tremendous pressure both above and beneath it. Then the superior position of the clerk told; and suddenly the lid dropped into its place. There was a sound as of a falling body within the coffin. At the same moment a terrible gasp arose from it.

Petroff lay upon his grisly couch more dead than alive. He scarcely felt the difference, now that all was once more quiet in the coffin. It seemed ages since he had last heard the Captain's cheery voice. Now he started to count the minutes as they passed. One minute dragged by. It seemed an eternity to the clerk. All was quiet beneath him. Two minutes passed by and then three.

He remained lying tensely upon the coffin. More minutes passed on. The suspense was becoming insupportable. Would the Captain and the Cossacks never come? Outside the wind was howling dismally, awfully, shudderingly, through the hills. It sounded like the wail of a thousand spirits. The clerk was on the verge of raving mania. Already he felt his control slipping. Already numberless strange, weird shapes were floating before his eyes, beckoning him into wild shadows.

Then of a sudden, all these mad thoughts vanished from his brain. It was as though he had been in a long drawn-out Gehenna. He heard distinctly from the outside five sharp whistles! Mother of God! The Captain and the blessed Cossacks had come!

He yelled triumphantly. Five more whistles sounded outside the little office. Yes! It was the Captain at last! Then there came three sharp raps on the heavy iron door.

Petroff hesitated no longer. With a sudden spring he leaped from the coffin and jumped into the darkness, toward the door. The coffin lay in the full circle of light, and he kept his eyes fastened upon it to see the being arise. With the sure instinct of the abnormally excited person, he found the bars instantaneously. In one second he had them up; and he

threw open the door, gasping.

Before him in the entrance towered a tall figure. Five others loomed up behind it in the ghostly background.

"Thank God! Posloff! At last it is you!" shouted Petroff, leaping toward the towering figure. "There," he cried, motioning wildly toward the circle of light in the far corner of the room, "there is the demon. Oh, my God! Holy Jesus! Do not let him get out!"

While the clerk yelled his incoherent sentences, the forms before him remained absolutely motionless. Now, the leading figure, lowering upon him, advanced ominously. The others followed close behind.

"By Heaven, it is you then, Petroff!" exclaimed Michael, the grave-digger of Kiel, in terrible accents—it was the leader that spoke—"and where is my brother Serge?"

The clerk gazed in stupefaction at the grave-digger's hardening features. He was dazed. He was a hopeless child. For a moment he could not understand that it was not Captain Posloff who stood before him. He passed his hand before his eyes.

"Michael," he gasped, as though trying to remember where and when he had seen him last. "It is you, Michael? Michael the grave-digger! But the Captain, the Captain! I thought it was the Captain! Oh, save me from the demon!" he moaned with the tears rolling down his cheeks.

At this moment the "pall-bearers" broke from behind their leader and rushed into the little room. Three of them dashed to the safe and began frantically working at its door. The other two ran over into the circle of light around the desk and bent over the coffin. They removed the lid and threw it on the floor. Then they busied themselves over the body within. This lasted but a few seconds. Presently they straightened up and rushed to Michael the grave-digger.

"Michael," they shouted. "No wonder your brother couldn't open the door for us; he is dead. The dog has smothered poor Sergius to death!"

The grave-digger recoiled one step, glaring insanely at the shaking Petroff.

Petroff, whining, the tears welling in volumes from his eyes, stepped pitifully toward him. He comprehended not a single word of what was going on. In the corner the three "pall-bearers" were working feverishly at the cash-safe. The other two closed around Petroff, watching their leader as he glared at the clerk.

Petroff advanced still closer to the grave-digger.

"Michael," he pleaded, "save me! You, too, can save me from the demon!"

The grave-digger regarded him cold-bloodedly for one single instant. Then with a howl of murderous rage, he leaped upon the unfortunate wretch. The blade which glitted in his hand spurted into Petroff's throat. With a ghastly gurgle the clerk fell face forward upon the snow.

Ten minutes later, when Captain Posloff and his twenty Cossacks came, they found the office door wide open, the electric light bathing the snow in front of the entrance. A

great pool of blood was streaming and coagulating at the threshold. They hurried inside.

In one corner of the room, near the empty safe, rested a huge coffin. It was one quarter open. Upon the lid, with its face down, lay the dead body of Petroff; while the blood from the gaping wound in his throat streamed down into the grinning mouth and upon the terrible visage of the body within the box.

The Missing Light

BY WILLIAM A. LEWIS

DOCTOR FRED and I invariably spent Thursday evening of each week smoking and conversing. He resided at the north end of Gloucester; I, at the south extremity. I did the visiting.

One Thursday night I started for my friend's house, passing the Gorman cottage, as I had done habitually. To my surprise I saw a light in the lower windows.

The night was cold, crisp, moonlit; and I started along the middle of the hard, frosted road, well muffled, and aglow with the exertion of a two mile jaunt.

I stepped into Doctor Fred's office. He was sitting before the small sheet-iron stove, and barely nodded a salutation.

I filled my pipe, meanwhile studying the countenance of my abstracted friend.

"I was surprised to see a light in the Gorman cottage as I came along."

Trifles prey upon us in small places, and we comment on them.

"H'm. Yes," he replied, yawning and stretching himself. He paused, and a sigh escaped him, broken into little pieces.

"George, what a wonderful, incomprehensible thing fate is!"

A dog barked, and somebody slammed a door in the house. Doctor Fred started and looked toward the curtained window. I looked the same way. On the floor I saw blood, and several red-stained cloths kicked into a corner.

"Been operating?"

He looked at me searchingly a moment, then turned in his chair, rested his elbow on the back, laid his cheek in his palm, crossed one limb with the other.

"George, I've something to tell you."

He shifted, like one unable to be comfortable; thrust his long, slender legs toward the stove hearth, crossed his feet, put his hands into his pockets, dropped his chin onto his breast.

"When I came to Gloucester, ten years ago, I fell in love with a tender little woman, the daughter of a fisherman. Our union was opposed by the hard-headed father. She used to meet me for an evening walk unknown to him, her mother placing a lamp in the sitting room window, and laying the door key on the sill.

"We relished our half-stolen meetings, until one night, returning to the gate, the light was missing. Fearful that her father had discovered our plan, and dreading his aroused anger, with my approval she went to a neighbor's and passed the night. The following morning she returned home. Her father was violent, declaring her absence sinful and shameful; ending by driving her from the house.

"She hastened to seek my counsel;

but I had been suddenly called away. I learned she took the next train. Her mother told me she had placed the light as usual, but the oil was lower than she thought. We searched for the girl; but no trace of her could be found.

"Five years ago the old man died; merciless, unforgiving, unsolicitous, to the last. Broken-hearted and hopeless, his wife passed away two years later. Then the home was closed up.

"Tonight, I was eating supper when a caller wished to see me. In my office I found Olive Gorman, trembling, gasping in the collapse of consumption. I clasped her ragged, cold, quivering body to my heart. She tried to speak; but a deluge of life blood poured from her blue lips. A moment later she lay in my arms, dead.

"We took her down to her old home."

Doctor Fred was silent for a little.

"If there had only been a little more oil in that lamp," he murmured.

I laid my pipe down, pressed his hand, and went out.

I passed the Gorman cottage.

All was dark.

Perhaps there wasn't enough oil in the lamp!

The Conversion of Paulo Rodriguez

BY HAROLD DE POLO

PADRE Bernardo, his round, genial face creased in smiles, his worn cassock fitting snugly over his short, stout body, trudged slowly along the principal street of La Cruz Blanca, the simple little village that was overlooked by his small white church that squatted so prettily upon the green hill above.

It was Saturday night, and the good Padre led, by a light rope, a fat and comfortable burro, bearing on its back the supply of food which was regularly purchased once a week; while about the little animal there was a certain air of contented expectation, as it knew well that when it reached the top of the hill it would receive two lumps of sugar in reward for its steep climb.

The narrow thoroughfare was gay to-night, for the few shops displayed their wares under extra lights; the shopkeepers themselves were arrayed in all the splendour of their holiday garb; and new *somberos* and *zerapes*, and frocks and *mantillas*, flaunted their gay colors bravely on the *peones* that bustled here and there, procuring their needs with the pay they had received that day.

The good Padre Bernardo liked Saturday night, for it was indeed a pleasure to see his children happy and carefree; he enjoyed his walk along the road, where one and all doffed their hats to him and exchanged cordial greetings; where some would stop and ask his advice, or tell him some bit of news, or maybe borrow a *real* or so until next pay day, and where he chided and laughed and joked with his loving children.

"Ah, Louisa, I see that Juan has bought thee a new *mantilla*, eh? And that he himself has a new *zerape*. Well, well, such is youth, and truly that shade of blue becomes thee, my dear!

"So, Tomaso, thou were a trifle late for mass last Sunday, no? I suppose you overslept yourself, but will be on time to-morrow, eh? Ha, ha, ha!

"I hear that you have payed off the little mortgage on the farm, Gabriel! I am indeed glad—very glad! Debt is a bad thing, and it is best to keep away from it. If you are ever a bit short just come to me—don't forget!

"Ah, Amelia, I see that the baby becomes stronger every day, and will soon be as big as her father, no doubt. A good man, and you are to be congratulated!" And so he went along, knowing well all the happenings, the secret hopes, the little troubles, the bright spots, in the lives of his beloved children of La Cruz Blanca, speaking words of fun or counsel to them, according to which he believed would do the most good.

Padre Bernardo soon came to the end of the street, where the road

widened out into smooth, low stretches of green plain, with tiny silver ribbons of streams cutting their way through in the moonlight, and where, to the left of him, the steep hill rose up on which his little church quietly stood.

But before he started to wend his way up the hillside, he stopped and shook his head most sadly; for he heard, coming from *El Gallo de Oro*—the *cantina* owned by Ignacio Barra, with the big golden cock painted over the doorway—the strident, harsh sounds of a ribald song, coming from the lips of a man who was just the least bit in his cups.

Padre Bernardo knew well who it was; one Paulo Rodriguez, a *vaquero* on the huge *hacienda* of Don Pepe Jiminez, who came to town every Saturday night, with several companions, and squandered his hard-earned wages; and who—which was, to the good Padre, quite as bad—never even came within a hundred yards of the little church, on Sunday mornings, where every single inhabitant of La Cruz Blanca, and others that lived far away, came to hear mass. Ah, yes; he would have given much to have won over this big, roystering, drinking Paulo and his careless companions.

But he sighed hopelessly, and in a moment more he clicked to his burro and resumed his way, passing in front of the *cantina*, that flanked the path up the hillside, and casting his kindly eyes within, a glance that disapproved strongly of the drinking *vaqueros* lined up against the bar. But he had not gone far beyond *El Gallo de Oro* before a loud, roaring voice called out after him:

"Ah, Padre Bernardo; come in and have a cup of wine with me, Senor Padre! Come—come!"

The good Padre turned about, frowning at the laughter of those within at their comrade's poking fun at the churchman. Then he eyed the large, burly figure of Paulo himself, leaning lazily against the doorway, an arrogant smile on his swarthy face, his wide *sombrero* cocked jauntily to the side, one hand curling his black *mustachios* and the other resting upon the pearlhandled revolver of which he was so proud, bought with several months' savings—a typical blustering bully of a simple little Mexican village.

Padre Bernardo was quick to make up his mind; he thought, should he ever be able to win the fellow over, that he would be doing an act that would please his Master. And so, with a firm step, he turned directly about and made his way into the *cantina*, tying his little burro outside the door, causing the animal to bray plaintively as it thought of this interruption that would prolong the time before it got its sugar.

"Thank you, my dear Paulo—thank you very much indeed! I shall be most pleased to have a glass with you!" said the Padre, a great smile lighting up his face, and just the least bit of a twinkle flickering in his eyes as he saw the astounded and gaping countenances of those about him, especially that of Paulo Rodriguez.

But the big *vaquero* suddenly recovered himself and winked at his companions. "Ah, Senor Padre,

don't mention it. But, come, let us drink; for I promise you that Ignacio Barra has good wine; eh, *amigos?*"

"Fine! Fine!" they chorused, and in a moment more some half dozen of them, including the Padre, were lined up against the low wooden bar, each with a glass of red wine in his hand.

Padre Bernardo, most politely and calmly, clicked glasses with the big cowboy and drained the contents of his own at a single gulp; which, to tell the truth, caused the *vaqueros* to eye him with a certain respect.

Again the glasses were filled, and again the stout Padre emptied his own, murmuring a short, inward prayer of explanation to the good *Dios,* telling him that what he was doing in such a place was done in the interest of Himself.

Now Paulo's idea, plainly, was to make the Padre drunk; and he set himself out to do so with great interest, laughing and joking and talking in a right merry manner. But Padre Bernardo was a man with an excellent constitution and a strong head, for he had lived a good life, and the years, although they had taken most of his hair and silvered what was left, had little effect on him. So he returned jest for jest, and laugh for laugh, and glass for glass, until, after the fifth drink, the big Paulo was gazing sadly at this short, stout little priest who seemed to take the wine as if it had been no more than water. Also, there was a frown on his brow as he saw the smiles on the lips of his companions—smiles that told him that they were laughing mightily at him, for the Padre, it must be admitted, was not in any way getting the worst of the affair.

Paulo saw, by now, that it would be quite futile for him to try to intoxicate the Padre; and again, as the big *vaquero* noticed the growing smiles on the others' lips, and saw that they were eyeing the Padre, whom they had formerly scorned, with a steadily growing respect, he made up his mind that he must change his tactics if he wanted to best the churchman.

Paulo was bound to do that; and suddenly, when he felt that he himself was getting a bit shaky, he banged the wooden bar with his great fist, winked slyly at his friends, and asked the Padre if he did not care to join him in a game of cards.

Padre Bernardo saw that he was gaining the respect of the *vaqueros*—although he did not exactly favor the means he had to take to do it—and roguishly, he himself winked at them very gravely as he spoke to the bully.

"What," he laughed, "you do not feel like another glass of wine, my good Paulo? Well, well, well! I suppose that you are too young, as yet, to have a strong head; and I am glad to see that you are wise enough to know when to stop!"

The best way to show how angry Paulo was, at this answer, is to say that his companions feared to show their mirth at the Padre's hit—for the big bully was a man with a nasty temper.

"What game do you play, Senor Padre," he asked, trying to pass it over, "*Tuti, brisca,* or what?"

"Anything you wish, my son! Any-

thing you wish!" Padre Bernardo agreeably told him.

Paulo was supposed to be quite an expert at the latter game, and his eyes glinted happily as he hurriedly made his answer. "*Brisca*, Senor Padre, if it is the same to you?"

"Certainly, Paulo, certainly!" replied the Padre as he seated himself at the table.

The *vaqueros*, as well as the proprietor of the *cantina*, all crowded closely about the players to watch this unique spectacle of a priest playing *brisca*, and in a *cantina* at that, with a bully of a cowboy.

"Ah, Senor Padre, and what shall the stakes be?" asked Paulo.

The Padre winced to himself, and again murmured a prayer to the good *Dios*, assuring him fervently that what he was doing was all for the best.

"As you wish, my son!"

"Oh," said Paulo, in an offhand manner, "let us say a *real* game!"

"Excellent!" assented the Padre.

The first game was quite easy—for Paulo; and he took the good Padre Bernardo's *real* with many points to spare.

"Ho, ho!" he roared, conceitedly, winking at his friends, "but possibly you will learn to play better as you go on; it takes practice, you know—*practice!*"

"Yes," answered Padre Bernardo, seriously, "so it appears!"

But it seemed, in the second game, as if the good Padre needed very little practice; for, strange to say, the *vaquero* and his companions were vastly surprised to see the round, genial, weather-beaten face of Padre Bernardo break into smiles as he won the game with a margin that was far larger than that by which Paulo had captured the first.

And then, after that, they were most prodigiously surprised. For the Padre won the third game; and the fourth; and fifth; and, suffice it to say, that after about an hour had gone by, Paulo was as red as a man could be, beads of perspiration were dripping from his face, and his forehead was creased in numerous lines; while his companions, one and all, were holding their sides as they rocked back and forth on their feet, unable to refrain from howling out their mirth in thundering accents. For the good Padre Bernardo, sitting there smiling so pleasantly, had resting before him the big silver *peso*, the smaller half *peso*, and the two *reales*, which had been all the ready cash in the possession of Paulo Rodriguez, who now stood there utterly beaten, a fearful rage in his heart as he saw the way in which his reputation was steadily falling.

"Ho, ho, ho, Paulo! Ha, ha, ha, *amigo!*" roared his friends, "thou wouldst have beaten the Padre, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

But Padre Bernardo raised his hand and stopped them. Then he spoke to them, looking exceedingly grave and exceedingly innocent, and his voice was kind and gentle. "It is not his fault, my children; for to play this game one needs practice, you know—*practice!*"

And, although it had truly seemed impossible, the laughter became still more resounding and ear-splitting at the gentle Padre's witty remark.

But that was the last straw. The *vaquero,* beaten at both his games, his head hot with wine, was rendered almost insane by the mocking laughter of his companions; and before anyone knew what he was about he suddenly thrust down his hand and extracted his big revolver from the holster.

"Dance, Senor Padre—dance!" he shouted, his face bearing an ugly leer all over it as he began firing his pistol close to the Padre's feet. And Padre Bernardo, who was wise, obeyed his commands with alacrity, making, if the truth must be told, a most ludicrous figure as he skipped heavily about, his cheeks puffing and his breath coming hard. This turned the tide in the *vaquero's* favour, and his companions applauded him willingly; and still the good Padre hopped and skipped and jumped wildly about. But he did it with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye, as if he enjoyed it all immensely.

But then, again, the Padre showed that he was not easily gotten the better of. For the *vaquero,* when he had spent his fire, unconcernedly lowered his revolver and commenced to fill the chambers for another dance. Suddenly, with such rapidity and dexterity as appeared almost impossible in one of his comfortable size, Padre Bernardo sprang forward, grasped the pearl-handled revolver firmly, and wrenched it, with a snap, from the other's hand.

Again he moved with great alertness, stepping quickly back and puffing mightily from his exertion; but now, although he still laughed, there was a certain sharp, stern light in his eyes, that told the rather dazed *vaquero* that it would be better for him not to say a word or to do a thing. While his companions, gaping curiously, stood by without moving, trying to puzzle out what would happen next.

"Paulo, my son," said the Padre, his voice calm, "we have had enough of dancing; and I think that now we shall have an exhibition of straight shooting and steady nerves! Kindly place your right hand against the wall—so, with the fingers spread wide apart!"

The bully did not at all seem to like the idea of this, and he made as if to step angrily forward.

But Padre Bernardo's raised hand and cool voice somehow deterred him. "Stop! It is now my turn to play! Also, I will say, to reassure you, that I was a prize pistol shot in my youth, and that my hand and eye, though slightly touched with age, are still extremely steady!"

Still the *vaquero* hesitated, his head hanging low, like that of a man who is contemplating some immediate action.

Again the Padre spoke. "Paulo, my son, kindly place your hand against the wall—so; with the fingers spread wide apart!" he repeated, his voice so quiet, so low, so dreadfully calm, that it sent a little chill up and down the bully's spine, and he felt himself impelled to instantly obey that cool command.

The Padre hastily murmured another little prayer to his *Dios.* Then his eyes twinkled and suddenly went cold; his hand was raised for a brief instant; and in a second more there

was a loud report and a spurt of blue and red flame.

The hand on the wall did not move. Paulo's head, only, was turned slightly to the side, and his face went a dead white from surprise—the little hole in the wall, between his thumb and index-finger, told him that here was shooting to be marvelled at. His companions were dumbfounded.

Padre Bernardo spoke once more, his voice clear, and he seemed taller and larger and more like a man of action than a simple priest. "Steady! I fire again!"

Then, in rapid succession, he pulled the trigger just three times. And when the smoke had cleared away the men saw Paulo still standing erect; and they saw, also, a small hole in the wall directly in the centre of the space between all of his fingers.

Now, although before they had thought of the Padre with scorn, they cheered him mightily. He bowed his head to them kindly and walked over to Paulo Rodriguez, who was as white as a sheet, still marvelling at the skill portrayed by this stout, simple, gentle little priest.

Padre Bernardo held out the pistol to him, and spoke in a slow, musical, kindly voice; and once more he looked the generous, quiet, Godly man that he was.

"Paulo, my son, I hope that I have not frightened you. I did it, as I did everything that I have to-night, but to show you that although one may be a priest, one may also be a *man*—a man who can meet another one on his own ground!"

For a few moments the *vaquero* remained rigid and silent. Then very slowly, he hung his head to hide the shame that was on his face, and, falteringly, he put forth his hand and spoke in a humble, reverent voice that no one had ever heard come from his mouth before.

"Senor Padre, you—you are a *man—a wonderful man!* And may *Dios* forgive me for treating you as disrespectfully as I have! I—I am ashamed—ashamed! Could—could you?" and his outstretched hand went close to that of the Padre.

Padre Bernardo laughed—a hearty, friendly laugh that was delicious to hear. "Why, my dear Paulo, don't speak of it—don't speak of it!" and he grasped the hand and wrung it fervently.

"Senor Padre," said Paulo, lifting his head and showing a face that was entirely changed—a strong, firm, honest face, "I—I promise you, by the memory of my mother, that I will come to mass every Sunday as long as I live—even if I have to crawl there!" He stopped and turned to his companions, "And—and so will my friends. Eh, *muchachos?*"

"That we will! That we will;" they chorused bravely, as the Padre beamed upon them. "And may *Dios* bless our dear Padre for ever and ever!"

"Thank you, my children, thank you! Until to-morrow, then, eh? *Adios!*" he said happily. Then, bestowing a blessing upon them, he walked out into the night, thinking, with a qualm, of the length of extra time his poor little burro had been waiting for its sugar, and vowing, that just for once, it should have three lumps instead of two.

The Severed Hand

BY M. E. BATCHELDER

IT was at the beginning of a new administration at Washington. Rumors were afloat that attempts had been made upon the lives of some of the highest government officials, and the police were on the alert. Then it was that the whole secret service of that city was thrown into a violent commotion by a mystery so baffling that scores of skilled men and women, who worked as detectives in citizens' dress, were unable to get at the bottom of it.

Because the entire secret service was unable to ferret out the mystery, the facts have never until this time been made known, and not even now would they appear in print were it not for a combination of circumstances almost as unnatural and as unreal as the crime itself.

One morning in the early winter, there was a startling rumor that a gardener employed in the Botanical Grounds had found a woman's hand in a barrel of water which had been placed in the sunshine for the benefit of his orchids. Terrified at the gruesome sight, he ran to the nearest police station and told his strange story, without taking time to remove his working apron. An officer accompanied him back to his greenhouse and secured the mutilated member.

It was evidently the hand of a young lady of great delicacy and refinement, not too small, but beautifully formed, with delicate vein-tracings, perfect lines, and long, tapering fingers, with exquisite shell-like nails, once pink and rosy, but now cold and almost as white as Parian marble.

The members of the secret service had followed up clew after clew, but each had proven futile when sifted to the bottom.

There was, however, one link which might form a part of the mysterious chain; but this link was now missing. A few days preceding the finding of the hand, several testified to having seen a young lady walking early one evening in one of the small out-of-the-way parks of the city. She was described as tall and graceful, modestly, but fashionably dressed, and when at one time she drew off her glove it was noticed that she had an unusually beautiful hand. She had been joined in the park by a tall, dark, foreign-looking man who, after a short conversation, left her. From that evening no traces of the man or the woman could be found.

After weeks of labor, the police were compelled to give up the case, and reluctantly admit themselves defeated. Finally "The Mystery of the Severed Hand," as it had grown to be known in police circles, was almost forgotten save by the old gardener, who always afterward examined the contents of his orchid barrel.

A German woman lay dying in one

of the wards of the charity hospital. As the end approached, her mind seemed troubled and she sent for a clergyman, who, on reaching her bedside, heard from her lips this strange confession:

"I was born in Germany. As a child I attended school, and when old enough went out to service. One day I went to a fortune-teller who was in the village where I lived, and a secret which she told me led me, years afterward, to commit a dreadful crime. When my parents died I came to this country, where I worked in several families. Some years ago I entered the household of a wealthy Washington family where there was only one daughter, a beautiful girl, scarcely eighteen years of age. My duties were those of maid and companion to this young girl. We grew to be fond of each other, so that she confided in me more, perhaps, than in her own mother.

"One night after she had returned from a reception at one of the foreign legations, she told me she had discovered that the man to whom she was engaged to be married had a wife in Spain. She had met him several times secretly, and had grown to love and trust him. She 'took on' awfully, and wished many times that she was dead. A few days afterward her wish was realized, for one morning we found her dead in her bed. She had taken an over-dose of sleeping powder, which I carelessly left in her room. I alone was permitted to prepare the beautiful dead for the grave.

"About this time a little niece of mine came to this country with her mother, my only sister. She was a bright, interesting child, and would have been beautiful but for a terrible birthmark on the side of her face.

"When I looked at this child there came to me the secret which the fortune-teller had confided to me long before—a charm which, it was said among the workers in the Black Art, would remove just such a mark as was on my niece's face. I must have brooded over it until my brain became feverish and my thoughts inhuman.

"It was I who cut off the hand found in the Botanical Grounds, believing that the blood of an innocent young girl applied nine times at midnight, would remove the ugly birthmark."

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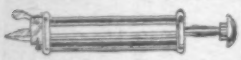

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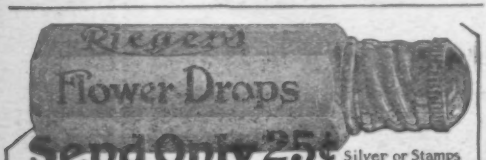

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